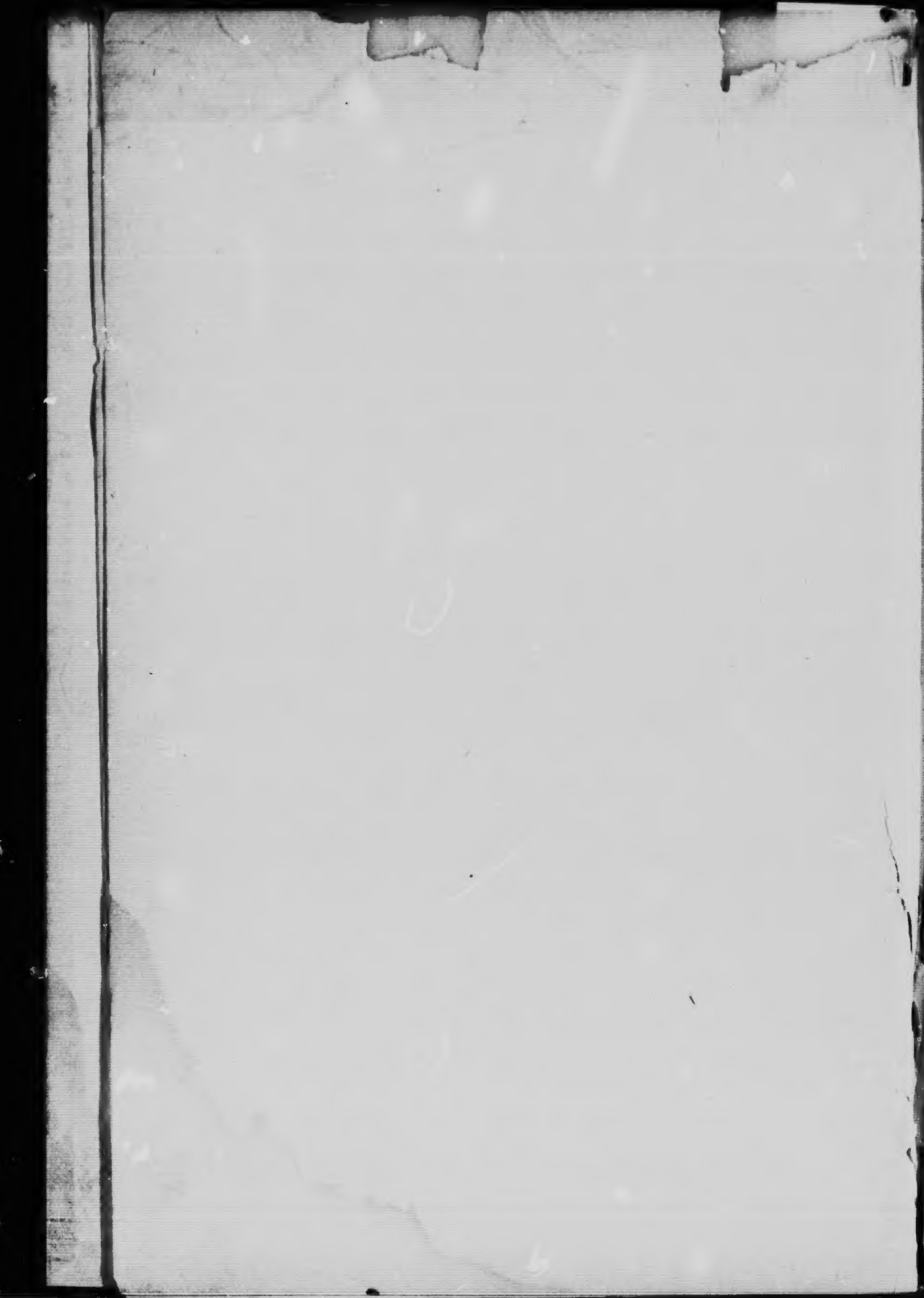




To Mrs. Dagg
In remembrance of the time
when she is some of these
SOME FURTHER studies in the
Cathedral Bible Class
Christmas 1903

PRACTICAL STUDIES

IN THE

HISTORY AND BIOGRAPHY

OF THE

OLD TESTAMENT

COMPRISING THE BOOKS OF

JOSHUA, JUDGES, RUTH, 1 SAMUEL, 2 SAMUEL,

BY

GEORGE HAGUE

OF MONTREAL.
Belmonte
Saint-John

"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for teaching and instruction in righteousness."

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INTRODUCTORY.

In issuing a second volume of practical studies on the Old Testament, the author has to say, at the outset, that, if they have any special characteristic and value, it is, that they are written by "a Man of the World," whose occupation necessarily sharpened and quickened any powers of sense and judgment that he might naturally possess. A man of the world he has been, and is ; not, however, in the sense of being a godless man, but one, whose life has been bound up, for a full half century, in the affairs of the world, and has had to do, very intimately, with the men who are carrying those affairs on.

The studies of this volume may, in fact, be denominated "the Scriptures viewed in the light of common sense."

Men who devote themselves specifically to a life of ecclesiastical study must, of necessity, to some extent, more or less *separate themselves* from the ordinary affairs of the world, as it is expressed both in the Old Testament and the New, which separation is apt to narrow the experience and affect the judgment.

This is, indeed, largely counteracted in men who have the actual charge of parishes and congregations or are charged with offices of government in the Church. For they thus come to have intercourse with all sorts and conditions of men. But it is apt to be strongly manifest in those who so separate themselves from the world that their life is largely spent amongst books, in the library, or the cloister. The development of this ecclesiastical or bookish habit of mind acts with peculiar unfavorableness, when judgment has to be formed, of the character, and doings of such men as are brought before us in Old Testament history. Almost everyone of these was a secular person : a man of the world, a man of affairs, a Judge, a Magistrate, a Soldier, a King.

So far as this present volume is concerned, it has to do

with Joshua, the Commander of the national forces, with Gideon and Jephthah, heroes raised up for emergencies, with Samuel, a God-fearing chief-magistrate, with the farmer's son Saul, raised up to be King and Commander of the people. Above all it has to do with that extraordinary and many sided man, the Shepherd King David. All these men moved in the secular sphere ; all were men of the world, using that phrase in its proper sense. And though the whole of the narratives are saturated, so to speak, with the idea of Divine manifestation and government, this manifestation had its sphere almost wholly in the affairs of State, of war, and secular occupations. In this consists the great difference between the Old Testament and the New ; for, the New Testament is wholly occupied, with the rise and development of the spiritual Kingdom of Jesus Christ.

Exercising then a judgment sharpened by constant exercise upon the manifold affairs of ordinary life, the author could not fail to notice the many correspondences between the events of Old Testament history and the events of modern times. Many of these are pointed out in the course of this volume.

And having given the studies of the leisure hours of more than forty years to these narratives he can say, with all sincerity, that his judgment as to their being true narratives of actual events, is much stronger at the end than at the beginning. As his experience of life and the world, and the ways of men have widened, so have his convictions become deepened and strengthened. Needless it is to say that his conviction of the truth of the narratives includes a conviction of the truth of miraculous intervention and of prophecy, as both are recorded in the narratives.

It includes, of course, a conviction of the truth of certain portions of the narratives, which, to some minds are difficult to reconcile with the goodness and wisdom of an Almighty Being—or with the general character of the men to whom the events relate.

As to miraculous intervention it is absurd to deny its possibility in the case of an Almighty and conscious Being. If there is no God, there can, of course, be no

miracle ; if there is, then miracles are possible. The sole consideration then is, whether the miraculous events recorded are reasonable in themselves; that is, whether the circumstances and the time, and the end to be answered are such as to justify, so to speak, some unusual manifestation of Divine power. A fair and candid consideration of such circumstances will convince any unprejudiced mind that this is the case. And this especially applies to the foretelling or foreshadowing of future events.

But, it may be said, is it not the case, that many men of learning and scholarship, in these times, have come to different conclusions ? To which, the answer must be, certainly they have.

Upon this the author takes the liberty to make a few observations :—

(1) Experience has proved that learned men are not always wise. In these very matters, the progress of time, investigation and discovery, have proved again and again that the opinions of learned critics have been utterly erroneous.

(2) The quality, above all things needed, in these matters, is soundness of judgment and freedom from bias and pre-conceived ideas. But the writings of the men of the School of Higher Criticism display many instances of bad judgment in dealing with narratives ; and also, a singular want of knowledge of human nature, and the ways of men and women as developed in the experience of this world. It is, moreover, evident, from their writings, that the minds of all of them are preoccupied by a bias against everything supernatural ; and this, as an antecedent principle. The bias is much stronger in some than in others ; but it is to be found in nearly all of them to such a degree as to weaken, or, in some cases, to destroy confidence in their conclusions.

There is no God interfering in the affairs of the world ; therefore there can be no revelation—this is the view of the old Deistical critics. Many others hold that there is a God, but they deny the possibility of miracles *ab initio*.

Others, while believing in a conscious personal God, deny that He would at any time communicate knowledge of

future events, or make known a system of secular law, or make favorites of one nation, and leave all others in darkness.

Another school of critics hold that all the actions of mankind must, in the nature of things, have, at all times, been governed by the law of evolution, and that if narratives of events are not in accordance with that law, they cannot be true.

Such have been the ideas pervading the minds of numbers of critics at the very outset of their investigations. It is clear, however, that such preconceptions must vitiate their conclusions.

To illustrate this, let us suppose a person who undertakes to write a history of Napoleon, to have a fixed conviction that it is impossible for any one man to be eminent both in war and statemanship. He will then be under the necessity of explaining away one or other of the great features of Napoleon's life. Either he will deny the account of his victories and ascribe the chronicle to the vanity and love of glory of the French people, or he will deny any credit to the great Emperor for the Code Napoleon or for the Concordat, or for the founding of the Bank of France.

But we well know that such conclusions would be utterly erroneous.

When the truthfulness of certain narratives is questioned, there are two courses that may be pursued.

The first is to examine such narratives in the light of probability, of reason, and of the fitness of circumstances to the times and persons spoken of. Do they or do they not correspond with what is known of the ways and doings of men as they are known to us. When taken as true, do they fit in, so to speak, with that conception, or does its adoption create difficulties that are insurmountable? If there is reliable and well-established contemporary history, does the narrative correspond with that? And, if there are monuments, still existing, do they confirm it or otherwise.

This is one mode of enquiry, and there can be no rational doubt that the narratives of the Old Testament emi-

nently answer this test. There is a reasonableness and a fitness in the course of events, entirely unlike that which characterizes legends. The men and women who move before us in the narrative are like the men and women of these times. The narratives are true to life and to human nature. They are eminently true to locality, as the author knows by personal observation—a point never to be lost sight of. The portraits both of good men and bad men are life-like. The frailties, imperfections and sins, even the crimes—of men otherwise good—are exactly conformable to experience.—

The mention of this word “experience” reminds us of the argument once founded upon it by a noted sceptic, but which has long ago been proved fallacious. Miracles are contrary to experience, said Hume, therefore, they never took place. To which the sound reply was the question :—*Whose experience ?*

For water to become solid is contrary to the experience of millions of people in this world. But, we, who live in the North, know that it does.

Experience is limited, in all cases. It is, therefore, an insufficient test. Applying this to the case before us it may well be asked what experience of the world, and of the ways of men and women have these learned bookworms had who discredit Old Testament narratives and pronounce them legends ? And the answer must be that their experience has been extremely limited.

But it will be asked, does the experience of any man of modern days embrace miracles ? Does it include prophecy ? Certainly not. But the truth of the narratives of miracles and prophecy does not rest on the argument from experience.

It rests on the argument of reasonableness, and on testimony of a high degree of probability.

Miracles and prophecy are just as reasonable in certain times and circumstances, as are eruptions, convulsions or any other manifestations of Divine power in the natural world. The strongest argument for miracles is the argument from reason and common sense. The miracles of Scripture will stand this test. The so-called miracles and lying wonders of priestcraft will not.

But there is another and a very sufficient test of the position of the critics, and it is this :—

The judgments that they have promulgated are founded on certain methods and rules, which, being applied to Old Testament narratives, demonstrate, as some say, that they are not narratives but legends and fables—or, as others think, that they are partly true and partly false. These methods and rules, in their judgment, act like the scientific tests of the quality of metals which at once declare whether the metal is pure or alloyed, and if alloyed, to what extent.

But, methods and rules may themselves be imperfect, deceptive, and misleading. In the case before us the methods may be tested by applying them to well known events and persons of modern times. If this were done, the following results would be reached by historical critics of, let us say, the thirtieth century of this era, should such a century be ever reached.

1. That there is a large element of legend in the stories of the reign of Queen Victoria, and particularly in the career of a certain Louis Napoleon, undoubtedly a fabulous personage ; also as to a war with certain farmers in South Africa, who are alleged to have defeated British armies and defied the whole power of the British Empire for two years,—an incredible absurdity, which no intelligent man would believe.

2. That the story that a certain civil war in the United States in the 19th Century, resulted in the abolition of Slavery must be false, inasmuch as the Constitution of the United States had declared, nearly a hundred years before, that all men were born free.

3. That certain writings purporting to be by John Milton, William Shakespeare, Robert Burns and others, shew such marked differences of style as to demonstrate that they were the production in each case, of two persons at least ; and in the case of the so-called Shakespeare, of three.

4. That many of the stories respecting a certain statesman of Queen Victoria's reign, named Gladstone, are undoubtedly fables ; inasmuch as it is impossible that the same

man could be both a Tory and a Radical ; both immersed in politics and a man of learned leisure, both a statesman of the highest eminence, and a blunderer who shattered his party ; the truth, apparently, being that the lives of several men of the same name had become, in course of time, merged into one.

These are the results which the methods of modern criticism would undoubtedly bring out. But such results would be all false, as we know ; from which we must conclude that the methods and rules themselves are faulty ; that they are like a compass so improperly charged with magnetism that it points always in a wrong direction.

The truth is this ; the so-called higher criticism has set itself to oppose and overturn the judgment formed of the Scriptures by the persons who lived nearest to the times described. In this judgment have concurred the persons who have known most about them, have most carefully examined them, and have made the most use of them for practical purposes ; and this during a period of more than two thousand years.

(1) It is certain that the Scriptures of the Old Testament were well known, constantly read, regularly commented on and made the basis of instruction in public assemblies, so far back as the time of our Saviour and His apostles, and that they were looked upon as Divine and authoritative at that time.

(2) The Great Teacher Himself so regarded them, so quoted them, so set them forth, and this even when He was declaring a higher fulfilment of them than had before been conceived of. And that a process of criticism and judgment was exercised, even at that day, as to which writings were authoritative and which were not, is evident from the fact that He never, on any occasion, quoted from any book of the Apocrypha. That He was competent to judge will not be disputed, even upon the lowest view that may be taken of his capacity as one of the most prominent teachers of his age and country.

(3) All this is equally true of the Apostles sent forth by Him, as is evidenced by their addresses and their writings.

One of them, and that the most prominent as a teacher, had been studying the Old Testament Scriptures from the time he had entered the schools of his nation. He, of all the apostles, knew most about the Scriptures, and he was the most constant in quoting them as authoritative. He, too, never quoted from the Apocrypha.

That the Apostle Paul was a man of judgment, well able to form conclusions and weigh opinions, surely goes without saying.

When the other apostles write or speak of the Scriptures it is in the same manner. And the apostles, like their Master, discriminated between the true Scriptures and apocryphal ones. For they never quote from the latter.

When, therefore, any men of this generation receive these Scriptures as true and authoritative, they stand on the sure ground of reason and common sense, as opposed to learned fads and fancies, and to the pre-conceived notions of professors and grammaticists.

They stand, moreover, where the founder of the Christian faith and His apostles stood in their day: on which same ground has stood for the last three hundred years, the Church of England, the Church of Scotland, the churches of Germany, Holland and Scandinavia, together with all the other prominent Protestant churches of Christendom.*

* In the studies of this volume special attention has been paid to those portions of the narrative which seem difficult to understand, such as the slaughtering of the Canaanites, and the Amalekite women and children, the so-called command for the sun and moon to stand still, the killing of Sisera by Jael, the conduct of Ruth towards Boaz, the vow of Jephthah, the visit of Saul to the witch of Endor and other such like circumstances.

THE BOOK
OF
JOSHUA.

CHAPTER I.

THE DIVINE COMMISSION TO JOSHUA.

In considering the events recorded as having transpired during the conquest of Canaan, it must ever be borne in mind that what was done was by virtue of a DIVINE COMMISSION. At the very opening of the book we read that "*the Lord spake unto Joshua, saying: Moses my servant is dead; now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, thou, and all this people, unto the land which I do give them!*"

That He who created the world and man himself, and ordered all things in the world to be suitable for man's occupation of its various parts, should have the supreme right of disposal as to who should occupy this territory and who that,—is indisputable. And that He had, many ages before, predetermined that a certain race of people, viz., the descendants of Abraham and Jacob, should occupy this region of country, and there develop that which should make them a blessing to the world, is recorded in the only history which tells us of the origin of this people at all.

So far, all is clear and easy to be understood. And if this land of Canaan, and territory adjoining, had been unoccupied, and the command had been given to enter it, to cultivate it; to build houses, plant vineyards, establish towns and cities in it; not a question could have arisen as to the reasonableness of the command.

But it was otherwise. The land was occupied; and to enter it, those who were in possession must be dispossessed. Dispossessed? But how? Who are the people that are in possession, and what is to be done to dispossess them? Here, then, arise questions that have perplexed some, and angered others, for ages. Are these Hebrews, by a Divine commission, to invade a peaceable country, make war upon the people, take their lands from them, occupy their cities and towns, their farms and vineyards, driving out the inhabitants by force? If so; on what ground? By what right?

Questions, these, that have been asked hundreds of times, and to which the only reasonable answer that can be given is that which is given in the Divine record, and which has already been commented on in these studies, viz., that the inhabitants of this land were notorious for their wickedness, that their religion was an abomination, that their ways had "*defiled the land*" for ages, that their iniquity was "rank and smelt to heaven," that Divine patience was exhausted, and that Divine justice had awaked; that, finally, the Divine decree had gone forth, that for their iniquities they must be cut off from the earth and be replaced by a people who would obey the commandments of their Creator.

This is the answer that the Divine record has given. And speculate as we may, and ramble in spirit round the whole circle of rationalities and possibilities, we must be content at last to come back, and rest in the assertion that the Sovereign Lord of the whole earth, the Supreme Judge of all men; the One who has procured Himself to be eternally and fundamentally RIGHTeous; all of whose moral precepts to mankind are good and true, and question, has so willed it to be.

We must contemplate, then, these Hebrew people as "*ministers to execute wrath*" upon those who deserved it; and commissioned to drive out from the land those who were unfit to dwell in it. They were not entering the land to wage a mere war of conquest, like many of the nations, Assyrians, Egyptians, Babylonians, Romans, who entered it in after ages, inspired by mere lust of territory. They were not entering the land under the influence of an ignorant and fanatical zeal, like that of the Crusaders of subsequent times. For the pretence of the leader of these Crusaders was false. The fiery monk who went through Europe crying, "*It is the will of God. Deus vult!*" had no warrant for his cry.

The whole course and final issue of the Crusades proved that the enterprise was contrary to the mind of Christ. Yet this, like the mission of the Hebrews under Joshua was for the conquest of Palestine. (See note at end of this chapter.)

The commission given to Joshua, however, had been too

surely attested to leave any doubt as to its being Divine. It amply fulfilled the only true test of any claim to a Divine sanction for measures affecting the temporal sphere, viz., that some undoubted exercise of Divine power in the temporal sphere should take place to confirm it. Joshua, and the people he led into Canaan, had seen too many instances of Divine intervention, both benevolent and punitive, to doubt that it was the voice of the Creator and Ruler of the world that commanded them to go into the land of Canaan and take possession of it.

Now every commission held by an officer in the British army emanates from the sovereign; and the orders of the sovereign, as expressed to him by duly constituted authority he is bound to obey. And if obedience to those orders involves bloodshed on a large scale, together with fire and desolation and destruction, he is still bound to obey. And he is not held personally responsible for bloodshed.

This army of the Hebrews had their commission too. But theirs was from the Sovereign Lord of all nations of the earth.

The extent of country granted to these Hebrew people was larger than is sometimes supposed. It comprised not only the whole region on the west of Jordan, bounded southward by the desert, and northward by Lebanon, but stretched eastward all the way to the Euphrates. A considerable part of the latter region was never occupied by the Israelites at all, unless possibly during the reign of Solomon. But in fact, when the region is passed through, which is watered by the numerous streams that fall into the Jordan, afterwards called the land of Gilead, there is little else but desert until the valley of the Euphrates is reached.

But the region of country granted to them was given for an inalienable possession; with a promise that Joshua should divide it for an inheritance, as had been "*sworn to their fathers.*" And it is interesting to note both *where* the land is and *what* it is. Of the ancient world it was the very central spot. Between Egypt and all Africa to the west, Chaldea and Babylonia to the east, Syria, Assyria, and all Asia to the north and north-east, with the countries now

forming Asia Minor and Europe to the north-west, this little country of Palestine was so situated as to be contiguous to them all. The position was perfect for the dwelling of a people who were to preserve Divine light and law for the nations; and of whom, at a future day, was to come THE MESSIAH, THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD, whose disciples from that centre were to go forth and make disciples of all nations.

And as to *what* the land was, there is not any where in the same space a region on earth in which such a variety of soil, product, climate, scenery, occupation, is to be found. It has a long stretch of sea coast on its western border. It has a magnificent fresh water lake in its interior; through the deep valley in the centre of the land flows down one of the most remarkable rivers of the world, the Jordan, into the most remarkable inland sea in the world, the Dead Sea, whose level is more than a thousand feet below the Mediterranean. The land has wide-spreading fertile plains, rich and fruitful valleys; numerous hills rising northward into the mountains of Lebanon and the snow-capped Hermon; rocky fastnesses also, and deep and wild gorges, with caverns in their sides capable of sheltering hundreds of men. In this land, the cultivator could sow his seed and reap crops of wheat and barley. Herds of cattle and flocks of sheep and goats could find pasturage on its numerous hill sides; vines and olives, and figs and pomegranates abounded in the slopes of its quiet valleys, while every variety of climate and temperature, from the snows of its mountain tops to the burning heats of the Jordan valley, would develop their peculiar tendencies in the population inhabiting them.

The land is in fact an epitome, in miniature, of almost every country in the world. And very much of the history of the Israelites, both in peace and war, took its rise from one feature or another of the land that was given them; and many incidents of that history, many remarkable adventures of its heroes, many allusions of its psalmists and poets, cannot be well understood without a knowledge of the land itself. And it is fortunate that in these days such facilities for travel and exploration have been furnished, that floods of light have been thrown upon the history and biography of the Hebrew people, as well as upon their poetical and

prophetical literature as embodied in the books of the Old Testament.

A better knowledge of the localities of the Holy Land has enabled many obscure passages to be cleared up and their meaning made plain. Many seeming contradictions have also been solved in the historical narrative, as men in these days, have come to understand the nature of the country, as determining the movement of armies, or the route of travel, or the ways of pilgrims to the holy city at the solemn feasts. And the more knowledge on these points there is, as to what parts of the country were plains and what were hilly or mountainous; where the passes and gorges were situated; what was the position of certain villages, towns or districts, the more the narrative opens up as a story of actual events, where the development corresponds exactly with the things that are taking place in these modern times.

There has been much misapprehension as to this. The narratives of the Bible, even with all the supernatural events that are related, are not of a world or a state of things utterly unlike what now prevails. The men and women, essentially, are exactly like what men and women are now; their characters and doings are precisely analagous to the doings and sayings of the people of the present age; the saints and heroes are "*of like passions*" with ourselves. Hence, what we can draw lessons of encouragement, warning, valour, confidence, courage, zeal, from these narratives. Thus are they profitable for correction and for instruction in righteousness.

The opening words of the Divine commission contain a grant of the territory, very much as a sovereign would make a grant of land to a faithful servant in modern days. And there is a further analogy: land and estates in Great Britain have again and again been forfeited by disloyalty and treason. Even so the Canaanitish tribes had forfeited the title to their land by wickedness.

The commission then goes on to give a solemn promise of victory, "*there shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life.*" A most inspiring and encouraging word, calculated, according to all the laws of the human

mind, to produce the very result promised. Then comes that great promise that has already been referred to, "I WILL BE WITH THEE; I WILL NOT FAIL THEE, NOR FORSAKE THEE!" As some renowned warrior, sending forth a son to an important command, cheers him with a promise to stand by him without fail and to come to his support if needed, as Napoleon did to Eugène before Wagram, so the Almighty Sovereign cheers this man Joshua, a most faithful servant and son, with this inspiring word, I will not fail thee; I will not forsake thee!

In war the issue of many a battle has been decided adversely by some supporting general failing to support at a critical time. This was the reason given by Napoleon for failing to annihilate the Prussian army at Ligny. A political leader may find his followers deserting him, to his defeat, and fall from power. In the world of business, in any sphere indeed, where the co-operation of men is needed to bring about success, failure to fulfil engagements has led to many a man's ruin.

Not so with the Divine helper.

We cannot wonder that this famous saying, I will never fail thee, was appropriated by Christian apostles to comfort and strengthen the persecuted of their time. They had, many of them, given up all. They are bid to lift up their hearts, for God had said, "I will never leave thee; no never, never forsake thee." (Hebrews xiii., 5.)

A poor, but respectable man, some years ago, was speaking with a rich capitalist of their respective conditions. They were friends, though in very different circumstances, and could converse freely. The poor man said to the rich: "I am, in reality, as well off as you are. You have your wealth to rely on, and I have *Divine Providence!*"

That is the sort of faith which makes men competent to dare and do, and fits them for great enterprises, either in the civil or the ecclesiastical sphere.

The commission concluded with a solemn charge to *keep the Book of the Law*; and to *meditate therein day and night*, that he might have good success. It is evident from this, that the law, as spoken to Moses, had been written out fully, and gathered together as a book, in the form, whatever it

was, in which volumes were bound or fastened together in those early days. So we read in the book of Deuteronomy, that the book was *finished* and *deposited* in the *ark of the covenant*; whence it could easily be brought for the use of the captain of the host when he desired it.*

The commander of the host was to *meditate* in the book. The true character of the Divine record is indicated almost immediately on the completion of the very first portion. A book to be meditated upon; a book to be well considered and turned over in the mind; an idea that is often reiterated in subsequent portions of the word. The good man who is sketched so graphically in the first Psalm is a man who "*meditates* in the law day and night." The wise Solomon, in the book of Proverbs (which is, however, much more than a book of proverbs), indicates how knowledge and understanding in Divine things is to be acquired, viz., by *seeking for it as for silver and hidden treasures*, patiently digging beneath the surface, and searching till its full meaning and import is opened up.

Lord Bacon, writing of books, observes of some that they may be passed by lightly; others may deserve more attention; while others must be "*chewed and digested*." Even so. And it was with full appreciation of the true character of the Divine word that the prayer was composed which is to be found in the collect of the Anglican Church, that as "*all Holy Scripture was given for our learning*," we may be able, not only to read, but to "*MARK, LEARN, AND INWARDLY DIGEST IT !*"

Superficial reading of Scripture is useless, in many cases worse than useless, as tending to doubt, or misapprehension, or dislike, or slighting. The Divine word is specifically of the kind that requires *meditation* for its profitable use; not but that, in early life, when memory is strong, and the faculty

*This phrase, *The Book of the Law*, spoken to Joshua before his own work was begun, and never used of any other writing afterwards marks out clearly.

1. That there was such a *book* or compilation, before the land of Canaan was entered at all; and therefore

2. That the books of Moses, gathered together by himself just before his death, are of a separate class by themselves, and not to be confounded with any subsequent books of Scripture.

of meditation not developed, much of Scripture may be profitably committed to memory for the faculty of meditation to be exercised upon in after days.

But when persons become old enough to be capable of thinking, the only worthy use to make of Scripture, is to think about its contents.

Such commands, promises, exhortations, as were given to Joshua, would inspire the dullest temperament with courage. But when communicated to a man of strong character, great natural courage, much military capacity, and a most devout spirit withal, such as Joshua undoubtedly had, they could not fail to develop a faith such as would remove mountains, and a spirit like that of Napoleon, when he declared that the word impossible was not in his dictionary. Yet Joshua was no foolish enthusiast, but essentially, as a military commander, a man of forecasting and calculation, such a man as was the general who gave the order "*pray—but keep your powder dry*;" a somewhat apocryphal story, perhaps, but instinct with practical wisdom.

We find his first care directed to his Commissariat. In verse 10 we find him commanding his *officers* (he had probably organized the people on a military basis) to "*pass through the host, and prepare the necessary victuals*." The Manna was still being provided; it only ceased after they had entered the land of Canaan. But they were now in a region where much more than Manna was procurable; and they were about to enter on operations where a better style of food would be needed to sustain them in vigour. Thus there was reason for the provident command to prepare victuals, that is, in addition to the Manna.

His next command was addressed to the men of the tribes who had their portion on that side Jordan, viz., Reuben, Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh; reminding them of the charge laid upon them by Moses in the Lord's name, that while their wives and little ones, and their cattle, were to remain where they were, the men were to pass over Jordan with their brethren in martial array (verse 14) to help them to fight; until the Lord gave their brethren rest, as He had

given *them*. For their part of the territory was conquered already.

And the answer was characteristic, as shewing what a different spirit now animated them from that of former days. Instead of a sulky murmuring and rebelliousness, we find a ready answer of acquiescence: "ALL THAT THOU COMMAND-EST US WE WILL DO ; AND WHITHERSOEVER THOU SENDEST US WE WILL GO. The spirit that animated Wellington's Penin-sular soldiers is here; men of whom he said, *that they could go anywhere and do anything!* And these loyal-hearted men went on (verse 17) to pledge their faith to Joshua as they had to Moses, invoking the favour of God upon Him, and declaring that any man that rebelled against his com-mands should be surely put to death.

Doubtless the whole people shared this spirit of hope and obedience, and it was thus that the enterprise of conquering Canaan was entered upon.

NOTES TO CHAPTER I.

AS TO THE CHRISTIAN CRUSADES.

The Crusades of Christendom in the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries, were expeditions for the conquest of the most sacred portion of the land of CANAAN. And they were analagous to the expedition under Joshua, in that they had for their purpose the driving out of oc-cupants who practised a false religion and were guilty of much oppression and cruelty. They were analagous, moreover, in this respect, that leaders and followers alike, in the Crusades were inspired by the conviction that their enterprise was the will of God. When Peter the Hermit poured out his fiery eloquence before the Council of Clermont, about the year 1100, the Pope himself being present, along with a multitude of prelates, princes and nobles, the whole assembly was carried away, as if by a divine inspiration, and cried out with a unanimous and passionate voice, *DEUS VULT : GOD WILLS IT !* And so strong was this idea of the enterprise being of Divine origin, that the words *Deus Vult* became the signal of battle and rendezvous in all the expeditions of the Crusaders. A cross was affixed to the right shoulder of all who enlisted in these holy armies, and every man, from the prince downwards who led them, was convinced that he was a servant of God and Christ.

Yet these enterprises were, with a few exceptions, disastrous failures. And their final issue was an absolute failure to accom-plish their object. The Holy Land after the last Crusade had retired from it, was as much in possession of the Mohammedan

power as it had ever been. And it was only too evident that the blood of hundreds of valiant knights and princes, and of tens of thousands of soldiers and pilgrims had been shed in vain.

The issue demonstrated that their great battle cry, *Deus Vult*, was a falsehood! It was not the will of God that these warlike expeditions should proceed to Palestine and fight to exterminate the infidels who possessed it. And if we ask the reason why, it is not far to seek.

The great and principal reason was, and still is, that it is not the will of God that the kingdom of His Divine Son should be advanced by the sword. (John xviii., 36.) The weapons of Christianity are wholly spiritual. The sword is *the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God*. The strongholds of the Evil One are not to be overthrown by cannon, by the storming of battlements, by the rush of knights through breaches in the walls; but by the preaching of the truth, the assault with the armour of righteousness, and above all, with that peculiarly Christian weapon of *All Prayer*. (2 Corin. x., 4-5-6.)

Then, finally, it has to be said that it is utterly contrary to both the word and the spirit of Christ's Gospel to attach any peculiar value or sanctity to places, to countries, cities, shrines. There was nothing more sad in the fact of Jerusalem being trodden down by the Mohammedan power than there was in any other part of the world being brought under its sway. The true crusade would have been a crusade of missionaries and preachers to proclaim the truth of Christ to the nations who were following the false prophet. That would have been according to God's will beyond doubt. These spiritual soldiers could have affixed the sign of the cross and the words *Deus Vult* to their shoulders with some assurance. And who can tell but that such crusades being in the line of God's will and having God's blessing might have resulted in the overthrow of Mohammedanism and its final extermination from the world.

But alas! alas! The errors of eight centuries ago have their fruit in this! The Church in medieval times (and partly in these too), utterly forgot the pregnant saying of our Lord when before Pilate, *If my kingdom were of this world THEN WOULD MY SERVANTS FIGHT. But now is My Kingdom not from hence.*

Fighting, and military force are for the kingdoms of this world alone, and not for the kingdom of G. I.

CHAPTER II.

THE MISSION OF THE SPIES AND THEIR CONCEALMENT BY RAHAB.—Joshua ii.

The first measure taken by the commander of the host, of the nature of active military operations, was to send two men to examine the country before them, and the city of Jericho particularly. It is well known that the function of the spy in war is a dangerous one; yet it is absolutely necessary. Everything depends on the commander of an army having accurate intelligence of the position and movements of the enemy, if they are in the field,* or of the strength, character and position of the fortifications, if it is a city that is to be attacked. The work of a spy demands great courage, coolness, adroitness and resource. If he is found out, he is shot without mercy; as the sad story of Andre in the American Revolutionary war vividly illustrates. In the memoirs of one of Napoleon's subordinates, Marbot, there is a striking account of his volunteering as a spy to cross the Danube in the campaign against Austria, and of the successful manner in which, in darkness and secrecy, he reconnoitred the enemy's position and brought information of incalculable value to his chief. So now Joshua, with a fortified city before him, and a difficult country beyond it, sent out two men, saying, *Go, view the land; and Jericho.*

All through these narratives, we find a remarkable combination of dependence upon God's power for help, and of the use of ordinary means. And though there are no visible miracles or manifestations in these days, who that watches the course of events, either in the church, or the world, or in his own life, can doubt that there is a divine ordination and intervention, and the working of unseen but powerful agencies, designed to bring about beneficent ends; yet all

* These words were written before the Boer War. But how strikingly its events confirm them.

working through the ordinary channels of human activity, so that while every man is intent upon doing his own duty in his own place, he is nevertheless assisting to work out the great designs of a Divine Ruler, whose plans and purposes may embrace the actions of men in numerous countries over a long course of ages. Thus the ideal life of every good man is one of daily doing of duty in the sphere to which God from time to time calls him; yet, all the time in dependence upon Divine strength and wisdom to enable him to do and to bear, in a spirit of willingness to be, and to do, and to go, as the Divine guide of life may indicate or determine.

It was in this spirit that the good men of these Old Testament times generally lived. And if they failed at times, their very failures should only encourage us, as shewing they were but men like ourselves, and that their good deeds were not those of beings of a superior order, but such as any man may accomplish in these days, who works as they did, in the love and fear of God.

The two spies then were sent out, taking their lives in their hands; two trusty and tried men doubtless they were. They were probably disguised, yet so watchful were the people of Jericho, under long expectation of an attack, that the entrance of these two strangers was noticed and reported to the chief magistrate of the city; here called king. (See page 48.)

The men, on entering the city went to a house of public entertainment kept by a woman, named Rahab, whose character has surely been misconceived. The Hebrew word by which she is designated is translated harlot. Yet it may mean either that, or the keeper of a house for public refreshment; an inn or tavern for travellers; and may have, like many other words, a good or an evil meaning, according to the circumstances in which it is found. Now that the above is not the natural meaning of the passage, must be evident if we consider the extreme unlikelihood of men on such a dangerous errand as theirs entering a house of evil resort; while it was a matter of necessity that they should find a place of rest and refreshment for travellers somewhere. And besides, the conduct and demeanour of this woman is

inconsistent with the idea of her being what she has been commonly supposed to be. Divine grace indeed can work upon the worst materials, and transform them into vessels of grace. But when a more natural and reasonable sense can be given to a word or a passage, it is a safe rule of interpretation to take it.

This woman, Rahab, then, was the keeper of a khan, or house for travellers; a respectable woman, though one of the inhabitants of Canaan; and she stands before us as one of many persons, who though brought up amidst idolatrous and heathenish associations had come to believe in the God of Israel. She perceived what the men were, through their disguise, and through strong sympathy with their cause, she determined at the risk of her own life, to save theirs, and to speed their errand.

Her words to them are remarkable indeed. "*I know,*" she said, "*that the Lord hath given you the land!*" How did she know this? She had heard it, doubtless, of the strangers and travellers who had stopped at her house, and who, at one time and another, told of the strange events that had been transpiring since the Israelites left Egypt. It had become well known all over the surrounding countries that these people were not like ordinary people, and that they had left Egypt in a very extraordinary way. The story of the passage of the Red Sea had got abroad, probably in some exaggerated form, and though it was forty years since it happened, such an event could not be forgotten. Doubtless there had been much wonder amongst the inhabitants of Canaan and the region round about as to what had become of them after their repulse when the first spies visited it; and, likely enough, there would be stories floating about during those forty years, that they had all perished in that terrible wilderness; the wish being "father to the thought."

But when they emerged from the wilderness in the country east of Jordan, and were heard of as making their way northward; and then as conquering Sihon, king of the Amorites, and Og, the king of Bashan, the people on the other side Jordan had reason to be afraid. And, when the host encamped on the plains of Moab over against

Jericho, its citizens might well be filled with a marvellous apprehension.

This woman is referred to in the Epistle to the Hebrews as a woman of FAITH (Hebrews xi., 31) and truly her faith is conspicuous both in what she does and what she says. She has come to believe in the God of these people; she has therefore forsaken the idolatry of her own people. She avows her belief,—a remarkable belief indeed for this heathen woman to have arrived at,—that *the Lord had given them the land, that He had dried up the waters of the Red Sea*. Still more striking was her avowal of belief in *the Lord God, as God in heaven above, and in earth beneath*; (chap. ii., 9-11), a belief so wholly contrary to the idolatry of many generations of her people that one may wonder how she came to have it, and leading to the impression that, as with Balaam, so with others, fragments of essential Divine truth had been preserved, and had filtered as healing waters through strata after strata of thick heathenish darkness.

One would much wish to know what were the thoughts of this woman's mind as she gradually came to the conviction that this strange foreign people were the people blessed by Almighty God; and that the gods of her own people were no gods, but mere vanity and delusion. She must have arrived at this conviction before the men came to her house. For it is evident that she espoused their cause at once, and took measures for their protection.

Apart from an overwhelming faith in their Divine mission every instinct of her nature would prompt her to give them up as enemies of her people. But she braved the possible wrath of the whole body of citizens in case the men were discovered; for it is certain that they would have been executed as spies, and that she would have shared their fate.

She deserved, therefore, the honorable place given her in the New Testament, as one of the eminent examples of that faith which constitutes the *very evidence of things not seen*, for she gave up a worship which centred round objects of sight, and which had everything to please the natural sense, for the belief in an unseen divinity, whose religion went counter to the natural sense, and demanded of its votaries

obedience to a series of strict commands; and she did this at the risk of her life.

She is also mentioned as one of the line from whom our blessed Lord was descended; for it is almost certain that the RACHAB of the first chapter of Matthew, was this very woman Rahab of Jericho.

But now, while noticing the strong faith of this woman, what are we to think of the deceit she practised and the direct lie she told. That she should hide the men is natural enough, and the place in which she hid them was not likely to be searched very narrowly, the top of the house, as houses were built then and now in Palestine, being very public and exposed. Much more likely that the cellar, or the stable, or some of the store rooms of a house of public entertainment would be used as a hiding place. Yet she chose the flat roof of the house with a true instinct, and covered them with stalks of flax, laid in order, a covering which would allow of their breathing. Yet we cannot but feel how perilous would have been their position had a careful search been made.

But when questioned, she told how that *the men had certainly been there*, but that *they had left her house about the time of shutting the city gate*; when it was dark, and that if quickly pursued they would doubtless be overtaken.

What are we to say to this? One view that may be taken of it, and that probably *would* be taken of it by military men, is that the country was in a state of *war*; a hostile army approaching, to which army these men belonged; that she had chosen to take the side of the invading army and to shelter these emissaries; that these men had committed their lives to her keeping, and that she was justified in using deceit as a stratagem of war,—as has always been the case both in ancient times and modern. Moreover, she might consider that according to all the laws of hospitality, she could never be justified in delivering the men up, but was bound to preserve their lives, even if it were necessary to use deceit for the purpose. From this point of view the woman's action might appear to be right.

But if it be considered that her action was wrong. What

then? Are we to defend her action, or to take her deceit and lying as an example? By no means. In that case, the just and reasonable mode of considering the matter is that, though a woman of most undoubted faith, she was not a perfect character. She was only just emerging from a condition of heathenism, in which moral obligations were held of slight account, and vice and deceit were universally practised.

She had strong faith, but not strong enough as yet to triumph over her heathen traditions and surroundings, so as to say, I will hide them; I will not betray them. Nothing shall force me to tell where they are; and the God who has delivered these people from Egypt will doubtless deliver them. This would have been a triumphant faith indeed; and it might have been, probably would have been, rewarded.

But her faith, it may be said, was rewarded in any case. The men were saved, and got back to the army, and she was saved too, with her house. Very true. She was rewarded for her devotion to the cause of Israel, in spite of the deceit she had practised to further it. Her faith was of Divine grace; her deceit a lingering remnant of human nature. And all experience shows this conjunction, in the same person, to be no strange and abnormal feature, either in those times or in these. In these studies it has already been pointed out that Abraham twice failed in *faith*, that Moses twice failed in *meekness*; Elijah, after an exhibition of marvellous boldness and courage before Ahab, was seized with an unmanly fear and fled from the threatenings of Jezebel. And in New Testament times, it was the bold and rock-like Peter who was most conspicuous in his *cowardice* when his Master was put upon his trial.

We need not wonder then, that this faith of Rahab was limited, that it carried her up to a certain point and no further, and it is needless to defend what she did, unless, indeed, her action may be judged by military rules, which may probably be, after all, the right mode of viewing it, considering the circumstances.

But let us follow the course of events, now that immediate danger to the spies has passed.

They could not remain in the city, that was evident. But a ready way of escape was at hand in the fact of her house being upon the city wall, as has been common enough in modern times. But before letting them go, Rahab said some very remarkable things to these spies. And what she said was an index to her character.

After avowing her faith in the God of Israel, as *God in heaven above and in earth beneath* (a conception very far removed from any heathenish conception of divinity) she proceeds to entreat the men to provide for her safety, as she had provided for theirs; and not for hers alone, but for her father's house: "*As I have shewn you kindness,*" she says, "*swear by the Lord that you will save alive my father and my mother and my brethren, and my sisters, and all that they have, and deliver our lives from death.*"

And the men answered, "*Our life for yours, if ye utter not this our business. And it shall be, that when the Lord hath given us the land, that we will deal kindly and truly with thee.*" v. 12-14.)

This solemn engagement was well kept on both sides. All that the woman says and does (the deceit alone excepted) gives a favorable impression of her character, especially her care for her father, mother, and family. And all confirms the reasonableness of the view taken of her occupation, viz., that she was no harlot, but a keeper of an inn, and an honest woman. This occupation was one that was often in the hands of the women of Egypt, and probably of other Eastern countries. And that it was natural for a woman to be the head of such a house is seen by the fact that in all well governed communities the woman is at the head of *every* house. And the tradition of woman as an innkeeper is preserved to this day in most of the inns of England, where the whole management of the house and the apportionment of rooms for the guests is in the hands of the wife rather than the husband; a woman keeping the accounts, attending to the guests, and performing all the duties of management.

But before letting the men go, a very simple device was agreed upon by which the house could be identified when the assault of Jericho took place. A line of scarlet thread was to be bound to the window, by which they were let down.

Thus the house would be known; and the men solemnly swore that when the assault took place, if the father, mother, and all the relatives of Rahab were gathered into the house, they should be preserved alive; provided only that they kept within the house. If they ventured out of the doors into the street, their blood was to be upon their own head; and the two spies would be absolved from their oath.

All which being said and done, she gave them the final direction that for safety they should betake themselves to the mountains (only a mile distant), hiding there, as they easily could, until their pursuers returned; after which they could make their way to the camp across the Jordan.

Then she let them down by a cord from the window on the wall (exactly as Saul of Tarsus was let down from the wall of Damascus many ages afterwards) and bound the scarlet line to the window. And we can imagine with what interest the intervening period was passed, and with what intense anxiety she would watch the progress of the extraordinary siege that took place, the seven times repeated procession of priests, the falling down of the walls, and the entry of the troops, until the moment when the well known faces of the two spies were seen once more, with a summons from the captain of the host to bring to the camp outside the city, the woman that had saved their lives, together with *all that were in the house; her family and kindred, and all that she had.*

Thus the oath was fulfilled, and the subsequent narrative adds, that "*she dwelleth in Israel unto this day,*" a collateral proof of the early origin of the book itself.

This woman Rahab was one of a series of Gentile and heathen women, and men also, who cast in their lot with Israel, and became sharers in the great blessing which was Israel's inheritance. Amongst such we may think of Jethro, the Midianite, the father-in-law of Moses, whose family became incorporated with the Israelites at the very beginning of their settlement of the land of Canaan, as we learn from the book of Judges. From this family came Heber the Kenite, whose wife Jael was the instrument of destroying the power of the oppressor and tyrant Jabin, the king of

Canaan. Ruth, too, the beautiful and interesting Moabitess, was one of these daughters of a wicked and idolatrous race, but who, of her own devout will,—strong will, indeed,—cast in her lot with Israel, came to Bethlehem with her mother-in-law, Naomi, and became an ancestress of David the king, and so of the divine Son of David, the Messiah. Naaman, the Syrian, too, may be reckoned of this number; and as time went on, many more, especially after the great dispersion of the Jews throughout the world.

For in the time of our Lord it is evident that throughout the Roman Empire many Gentiles had abjured the idolatry of the Pagan world, and embraced the religion of the Jews, so far, at any rate, as the worship of the one living God was concerned.

Of these we have a conspicuous example in that good Roman soldier, Cornelius, who is described as "*a devout man, giving alms, and praying to God always.*"

In truth, it appears by many passage of the Old Testament that although the Israelites, before the time of the Messiah, had no commission given them to proselytize the nations (as Christ's Apostles had), yet they were enjoined to welcome the stranger who desired to cast in his lot with them, and worship the God of Israel. And, as we know, both psalms and prophecies abound with sentences as to the nations of the earth coming and submitting themselves to Him who is described as God of all nations of the earth.

But the subsequent development is sad and strange indeed. Christ came, being *of the seed of David, according to the flesh*. He gathered about Him a band of followers whom He sent forth to teach, every one of whom was a Jew; all His early disciples were Jews; He enjoined the Apostles to begin the work of evangelization at Jerusalem, and they did begin at Jerusalem. The great multitude of the early converts were Jews; it was to the Jews of the great cities that the Apostles always addressed themselves first; and every line of the New Testament was written by Jews. Would it not be almost certain that people of the Jewish race would always be the foremost Christians in the world! Yet what have we seen? The Jewish people, after the times of the Apostles, almost universally fell away from the Christian

religion, and they have continued alienated ever since. And for nearly eighteen centuries, this religion of Christ, which is essentially an expansion and development of the religion of Moses, and of David, and of the prophets who came after them, has been professed and propagated, and is now being spread through the world by men not of the seed of Abraham at all, but whose ancestors in Old Testament times were almost universally barbarian and heathen.

Such are the deep mysteries of Divine government. And so it shall be, until "the times of the Gentiles" be fulfilled; when all Israel shall come in and be saved; sitting down with men from the East, and the West, and the North, and the South, in the kingdom of God.

NOTES TO CHAPTER II.

AS TO THE CHARACTER OF RAHAB.

The Speaker's Commentary, in remarking upon the character of Rahab, has called attention to a passage in the Book of Leviticus which has a very practical bearing on the question. In the twenty-first chapter it is expressly forbidden for a priest to marry a prostitute, and one reason given is that a priest is a *chief man among his people*. Now the whole congregation were so far "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" that such a prohibition would surely apply to any of them, but certainly to any of the chief men of the families of Israel.

But we learn from the first chapter of Matthew that one of the princes of Israel, Salmon, the son of Nah-hon, of the tribe of Judah, married Rahab, from which union sprang Boaz, the grandfather of David. Now it is incredible that a man of such a family would so violate the spirit of the Mosaic law, and degrade himself amongst his people, by marrying a woman, no matter who she was, that had ever been a prostitute. All of which supports the view promulgated by Josephus and some ancient writers that Rahab was not a harlot but an innkeeper.

AS TO THE TYPICAL MEANING OF THE SCARLET THREAD FASTENED TO THE WINDOW.

That the thread was chosen of scarlet rather than of any other color, by Rahab, as a sign, is plainly for the simple reason that scarlet would be the most easily distinguished of all the colors by those on the lookout. But some Christian Fathers and others, in commenting on the circumstance, were not slow to perceive in this scarlet thread, and its being the means of salvation to Rahab and her house; a striking analogy,—first to the blood which was sprinkled on the door-post on the night of the first passover, for salvation to the Israelites; next to the blood of the sacrifice

sprinkled on the altar, as an atonement for sin; but, far more than all, to the blood of the Son of God, who by the Eternal Spirit was once for all offered as a propitiation for the sins of the world. This analogy, we must bear in mind, is not authoritative and scriptural. But it is natural and simple, and therefore suggestive. So it has come to pass that this scarlet thread, thought of only as a means of safety by this woman of thousands of years ago, has been lifted up from its natural surroundings into the region of high and spiritual teaching for the encouragement and comfort of multitudes of believing people, who through it can lay hold on that blessed blood of sprinkling which is better than the blood of Abel.

CHAPTER III.

THE CROSSING OF THE JORDAN AND ENCAMPMENT BEFORE JERICHO.—Joshua iii., iv., v.

The crossing of the river Jordan by this host, at the time of year when it is confined to its ordinary channel, would have been a comparatively simple matter ; inasmuch as it is then in most places only a hundred feet wide, while there are fords in that part of the river by which it can be crossed without difficulty.

These fords are alluded to in the second chapter (v. 7) as the place to which the men who pursued after the spies naturally directed their steps. No miracle would have been required to enable the host to cross by one or more of these fords in ordinary circumstances.

But after the winter snows of the uplands beyond the Sea of Galilee have melted, there is invariably a great rise in the river, which then spreads over the lower reaches of the plain to a considerable distance, making a flood of great width and depth with a strong and rapid current, and impossible to be crossed anywhere except by swimming. The two spies must have got across in this manner ; and, doubtless, two athletic men were selected for the purpose. But for a host of men, with the impedimenta of an army, to attempt it, not to speak of the priests with the ark, and probably the tabernacle also, would be certain destruction.

And, doubtless, the reason why the crossing was not opposed by the people of Jericho was that it was deemed to be impossible at that season.

But in these narratives we are constantly reminded of that saying of our Lord, that *what is impossible with men, is possible with God*.

This, however, goes to the very root of the matter. And this event, even more than the passage of the Red Sea, bears distinct marks of Divine intervention. It was quite possible

for all that took place in the crossing of the Red Sea, as has already been pointed out, to take place from the working of natural causes, that is, so far as the rushing hither and thither of the waters was concerned. But what is related here of the stopping of the waters of the flood from coming down from above, and their consequent draining away below, could not possibly take place except by the operation of Divine power. The question to be considered then with regard to this drying up of the Jordan flood is this: is there any existing power, operating in the natural sphere of the world that is strong enough to accomplish it. To this there can be only one answer, viz., that the ultimate force that is operating in the natural sphere, and bringing about the changes of night and day, and summer and winter, is so inconceivably strong that such an exercise of power as would be required to dam up the Jordan would be, speaking with all reverence, the simplest child's play. There is, however, a further question (for we are now going back for a moment to first principles), viz., is this ultimate force conscious, is it the force of A BEING ; a Being with life, and volition ; or is it force pure and simple, operating without life, without being, without volition, simply dynamically. These questions have been argued in former pages of this work, and it will suffice here to say that enormously preponderating reasons can be given for the former view; which may perhaps be well summed up in the pregnant query, "*He that formed the eye, shall He not see ?*" (Psalm xciv.) Or, if any prefer it, it may be stated as "THE POWER THAT FORMED THE EYE, SHALL IT NOT SEE ?" a question which irresistibly carries its own answer.

Thus, then, even natural reason leads to the conviction of the presence of a conscious ever-operating power in the sphere of the natural world ; ordering the movements of the sea, the flow of the rivers, the melting of the snows, the moisture or dryness of the atmosphere, and everything else that we call natural phenomena. And if this conscious power, with its irresistible volition, has designs and purposes respecting mankind, or any nation of mankind, that require the putting forth of unusual and wonderful power,—miraculous power, in fact,—may we not reasonably expect that such power will be manifested ?

Even thus it was.

The Divine Guide of this people ordained that they should proceed, at this time when Jordan was flooded, to cross over to begin their conquest of the land ; a conquest long ago foreordained and promised. To effect this, it was absolutely needful that the river should be crossed ; a thing impossible unless the water could be dammed up above so as to leave a dry channel for the passage. This phenomenon was effected. The water which came down from above stood still, and rose up to a higher level, exactly as if a dam had been built across, at a point near Zaretan, a place that is with good reason supposed to be about twenty miles north of the spot where the crossing took place. This would cause the waters that flowed down to the *sea of the plain, even the Salt Sea*, to fail and be entirely cut off, leaving the bed of the river dry.

To discuss the physical means of accomplishing such miracles does not always throw much light upon them ; but it is easy to see that if by some sudden convulsion, or earthquake, the ground occupied by the river at Zaretan were tilted up so as to form a dam, all that is related would come about naturally.

And it is a fact that at a point about seventeen miles above Jericho the banks of the river are formed of high rocks which approach each other so that the river here is at its narrowest point, the rocks forming almost a barrier across it. This doubtless was the place where the Divine barrier, by some means or other, was actually thrown across it for a brief space. And the supposition is strengthened by the fact that at this spot rises a lofty and isolated hill now called *Kurn Sartabeh* (Horn of Sartabeh) a name sufficiently like Zaretan to make the identification probable.

These, however, are mere surmises, and have only a suppositious bearing on the actual narrative, which is given as a *manifest token* that God will give them success.. It was given also that the people might be led to look up to Joshua, as their leader, with confidence. For *the Lord said to Joshua*, "*This day will I begin to magnify thee in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that as I was with Moses, so WILL I BE WITH THEE !*"

And then Joshua said to the people, *Come hither and hear the words of the Lord your God. Hereby shall ye know that the living God is among you, and that he will without fail drive out the Canaanites from before you. As soon as the soles of the feet of the priests that bear the ark of the Lord—the Lord of all the earth, shall rest in the waters of Jordan, the waters shall be cut off from the waters that come down from above.* (v. 9-13.)

And so it came about. The order to march had been arranged. First went the ark and the priests; then, at a distance of about half a mile, the main host; doubtless that all might see the ark more clearly. The people had been commanded to *sanctify themselves*, as they had before the Mount at Sinai, and prepare for a high and solemn manifestation of the Divine Presence amongst them. Thus this passage of the Jordan was a great religious ceremony; and not a mere ceremony, but an occasion of profound and awful realization that *the Lord of all the earth*, a name not before given to the Divine Being, was amongst them to work signs and wonders on their behalf. In this spirit the passage of the river was made. *The priests with the ark stood firm on dry ground in the midst of Jordan*; all the host hasting to pass over in their presence, the priests finally passing over last of all. And thus they touched the soil of Canaan for the first time. Two very significant memorials were erected. Twelve stones from the bed of the river were taken and set up in the plain between the river and Jericho; and other twelve, also from the bed of the river, were set up as a pillar in the midst of its channel.

Both these were prominent objects, designed to commemorate the miraculous passage, as a sign in time to come, and *to teach the children of that day, who would ask the meaning of the stones*, that the power of the Lord had been with their fathers, and that it was He that brought them into the good land. And not only so, but *that all the people of the earth may know the hand of the Lord, that it is mighty; that ye might fear the Lord your God for ever.* (chap. iv., 24.)

And thus it came to pass. For the kings of the Amorite and Canaanitish nations, when they heard of this extra-

ordinary passage, became utterly disheartened; *their hearts melted, neither was there spirit in them any more, because of the children of Israel.*

What might have happened had they universally submitted themselves can scarcely be said. There was one case of this kind, viz., that of the inhabitants of the city of Gibeon, who obtained remission from the calamities of war by false pretences. Their lives were spared, as had been promised them. But, naturally and justly, they were relegated to the position of bondmen.

THE CIRCUMCISION AT GILGAL.

The very first act that took place when the people set foot in the land of Canaan was to renew that ancient covenant of Circumcision which had been given ages before to their ancestor Abraham.

This was not a mere ceremonial rite, but the very sign and sure seal of their continued separate existence as a nation, or peculiar people, under the protection of Almighty God in a special and peculiar sense. For this care and protection was most evidently something above and beyond that providential care which the Almighty Creator bestows upon all His creatures. That *He maketh His sun to shine upon the evil and the good, and sendeth rain upon the just and the unjust* is a most evident truth of all times and *places*. It is most apparent in our own day. But there was a special order of providential care in the case of this nation: a care extending to the higher matters of social, national, and even spiritual life; a care which provided a system of religion and law to be for them alone. And it was of this special order of providential government of this people that circumcision was the sign and seal. And so it has remained to this day, in a sense. All study of history in a purely secular sense would lead to the conclusion that this nation and race would long ago have been absorbed, and have lost its identity, had there not been a special Divine interposition to preserve them. And of all this, circumcision is still the outward mark, and

it is carefully observed as a distinguishing characteristic by all Jews in every country of the world.

But it should be remembered that circumcision conferred no spiritual power, grace, or faculty upon the individual recipient, and it is never set forth as conferring such, either in the Old Testament or the New. Its benefit was simply to admit its recipient to a share of national privileges, and to a place in a society where the worship of Jehovah was constituted and His law promulgated; where, from time to time, prophets declared His will, and where, at times, extraordinary manifestations of Divine power took place. Circumcision assured to the child a religious education, and participation in Divinely ordained religious ordinances. If the circumcised person on growing up, used rightly and wisely all these means of spiritual blessing, it was well for him. But if he did not, circumcision profited him nothing. Thus reasoned the Apostle Paul (reasoned, with a Divine intelligence guiding him) in writing to Roman Christians, and to the Christians of Galatia, "*He is not a Jew, who is one outwardly, neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh. But he is a Jew who is one inwardly, and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter, whose praise is not of men, but of God.*" Then, answering the question, what then is the good of circumcision? the Apostle points out that to the people who were circumcised *was committed the keeping the oracles of God*, with all that this implied and carried with it.* (Romans ii., 28-29, also iii., 1-2.)

*The analogy between this and the Christian baptism of infants is close and obvious. Baptism introduces to the outward fellowship of the Church, and if rightly followed up, to a condition of much religious privilege, Christian education, church worship and teaching, and all the outward media of spiritual blessing.

But it cannot be maintained, even by those who hold to the doctrine of baptismal regeneration, that baptism, in itself, brings about, or produces, any change in the soul or spiritual nature of the recipient. Indeed, the very form of the baptismal service of the Anglican Church leads to another conclusion. For baptism even of an infant is preceded by a declaration of repentance and renunciation of sin, as well as of faith in God and Christ,—made by sponsors on the child's behalf. And only on such a declaration being made is baptism administered, and the child declared regenerate. Just as Abraham received the sign of circumcision after he had believed, and had been justified by his faith; received it *as a seal of the*

So, then, this rite of circumcision was observed on the plain near Jericho, and the reason given was that it had never been observed during their long wanderings in the desert; for what reason does not appear. The rite being duly observed, the Lord said unto Joshua, *This day have I rolled away the reproach of Egypt from off you*, which means, plainly, that the people of Egypt were an uncircumcised race. This shows the fallacy of the assertion that circumcision was a rite which Moses had learned from the Egyptians. This rolling away of reproach gave its name to the locality, viz., GILGAL, a name which signifies "rolling," a locality of which much is heard in subsequent history.

While in Canaan they kept the first Passover celebrated in the Land of Promise, the first of a long series that continued, with only the interruption of the Captivity, down to the times of the New Testament.

And it is recorded that here the Manna ceased. We may wonder that the Manna continued so long, seeing that, from the time they entered the territory of Moab and continuously onwards, they occupied a fertile country, a land not differing materially from the land of Canaan. But of the need for the continuance of Manna, we cannot at this distance of time, and in the absence of a reason alleged, rightly judge. It is very possible, however, that it continued in a much diminished form after the host arrived in the land of corn and wine. But speculations and suppositions on the subject are vain. It certainly continued as long as there was need for it, and ceased when there was no need for it. But this Manna has never ceased to be a lively image of the "true bread from

righteousness he had while yet uncircumcised (Romans iv., 19-11) so the sign of baptism is bestowed upon those who believe before baptism is administered, as a seal of the righteousness which their faith has brought them.

It is universally conceded that baptism should only be administered to those who believe. This belief justifies (Romans v., 1), and baptism is its seal, and is also the rite by which connection is made with that spiritual Israel, the Church of God. Whether this outward act and sign will be followed by spiritual realities, depends, as in circumcision, so in baptism, on subsequent conduct.

heaven," even the Son of God, who was given for the life of the world. (John vi., 33.)

And now, while the army was before Jericho, a most significant vision or manifestation was vouchsafed for the encouragement of the General.

Joshua was, it is said, by Jericho, reconnoitering, examining, doubtless, its defences, and considering how a city with walls such as Jericho had could be taken by such an army as his. For, numerous as they were, they had apparently no appliances wherewith to attack a walled city. That the art of masonry was so far advanced in those days as to enable fortifications to be erected where they were needed, is evident from the great works which still remain in Egypt. Between Egypt and the countries adjacent there had been for ages, constant intercourse, so that the knowledge of the art of building could readily have spread to them. And that the arts of masonry and building were well advanced amongst the Canaanitish nations is evident from the report of the first spies sent out. They spoke of the cities being "*walled, walled up to heaven.*" Allowing for an evident tone of exaggeration in their report, there can be no doubt that some of these cities were surrounded by high walls of strong masonry. Such was the city before him. But it was absolutely necessary to take it. For if they pushed on and passed it, making their way up the mountainous passes leading into the interior, they would leave the whole of the women and children and goods and cattle in the plain across the Jordan exposed to depredations; in fact, to certain destruction. For it seems probable that the women and children, most of them, at least, had not accompanied the army across the Jordan at this time.

Another reason of necessity for taking the city was that this plain of Jordan was the most suitable base of operations against the interior.

Thus, then, Joshua, his mind filled with thoughts of how a city like this could be taken; wondering, yet confident, for he was a man of great faith; musing probably on some possible new and marvellous development of Divine power in connection with it, was suddenly confronted with an armed

man, *his sword drawn in his hand!* Astonished, yet not afraid, in his vision he walks up to the man, doubtful whether he was an inhabitant of the city, or possibly one of his own subordinates straying from the camp on the same errand as himself. He addressed him with the pertinent query, *Art thou for us, or for our adversaries?* To which he received the strange reply, *Nay, but as Captain of the Lord's host am I now come!* Captain of the Lord's host! Surely the man must be mad, or dreaming! Has he come to supersede me! But something occurred, all in a moment, which showed Joshua that this was no mortal soldier. As with Jacob at the night of wrestling; as with Moses at the burning bush; as with the two disciples at Emmaus, there was a revealing flash, that showed a Divine Presence.

Joshua now *fell on his face to the earth, and did worship, and said unto him, What saith my Lord unto his servant?* Even so. What saith MY LORD to his servant? Almost the very words with which the awe-struck Saul of Tarsus tendered his humble submission in another Divine vision, to Jesus of Nazareth, whom he had persecuted.

Yet there was no revulsion of feeling with Joshua, no instantaneous change of the purposes of a life, as with Saul. For, just then, a Divine interposition was what Joshua was most pressingly in need of. A Divine Captain come to lead the host! How gladly would Joshua yield up the command to Him! Victory would be sure with such a commander. He would show them how to take the city, how to batter down those frowning walls. But a moment before, Joshua was perplexed, he was anxious, he could not see the way. Now, while prostrate on the ground, in the face of the heavenly captain, all anxiety, all perplexity vanishes. *Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth*, as was said on another memorable occasion; this was the language of his heart.

Then the Captain of the Lord's host gave the well-known command, once before spoken in the case of Joshua's former leader, *"Loose thy shoe from off thy foot, for the place whereon thou standest is holy. And he did so."*

The Lord then announced how the city was to be taken. This, however, must be considered in a subsequent chapter,

Meantime, let us think of the significance of the incident itself, as an illustration of the manner in which Divine help is so often vouchsafed in a time of need. "Man's extremity is God's opportunity." This proverb, like most other proverbs, condenses the result of many observations and experiences into one pregnant sentence. It is surely so. When there is no way, then God shows the way. It is in the Mount, the mount of extreme trial, that the Lord is seen. So the saints of God have been taught to expect; and, in all emergencies, in all dark hours, when the storms of life are beating around them, to say, with confidence, *The Lord will provide!*

CHAPTER IV.

THE FALL OF JERICO. THE DISASTER AT AI.

(Joshua vi., 7.)

The first scene in the conquest of Canaan was not of the nature of a military operation in any respect. And one may easily conceive that when the "mighty men of valour" in the army heard what steps were to be taken to capture Jericho, they should be deeply hurt and offended. What? they might say, is it the priests that are to have the glory of this first enterprise? Is this the way in which we are to take possession of the land? If that be so, we soldiers might as well rejoin our wives and children, and stay in camp until the priests have finished the conquest. Such murmurs as these have often enough arisen in the conduct of modern armies. Such murmurs and jealousies had much to do with the failure of the Crusaders to conquer the same country. The Crusaders were tormented with internal divisions, as the sovereigns and princes of Europe and their respective partisans quarreled and intrigued, crossed each other's purposes and thwarted each other's plans.

And these Israelitish people were no strangers to jealousies and murmurings. There had been enough, and more than enough of these in the lifetime of Moses, and nothing would have been more natural than for such an outbreak to take place now. But there was not a sign of it.

The mysterious *Captain of the Lord's host* had announced that the army was to march in solemn procession round the city, the priests at their head, bearing the ark, and sounding rams' horns, and that this was to be done every day for seven days. Then on the seventh day, the procession was to march round seven times; the priests were to blow a loud blast, the soldiers of the army were to shout with a great shout;

that then the wall of the city would fall down. Then they were to ascend up and take the city. Surely these were the strangest marching orders that had ever been given to an army. No preparing of engines of war, no trying to find a weak spot in the defences, and rushing in when they found it; no endeavoring to draw out the besieged from their stronghold; no scaling ladders, but simply marching round in solemn procession! Even to these people, with all the wonders they had seen, no such commands as these had ever been given. They had fought battles, they had taken cities, they had conquered countries, but all by ordinary military appliances; no other Divine help being given than has been given to numbers of other God-fearing soldiers, even down to our day.

But this style of taking a city! Might not some of the sceptical amongst them exclaim against it as a mockery! Fight, they might say, we will, or we are ready to sit down and wait while it is starved into surrender. But this solemn marching round and round with a company of our priests blowing horns is too ridiculous. We shall be a laughing stock to the people of the city. All the people, even the women and children, will come out on the wall to look at and cast jibes and mockery at us. Surely our good general must be mad.

Thoughts like these would be most natural, and very likely such were indulged by some.

For undoubtedly this marching was a severe trial of faith to the soldiers of the army, from Joshua downwards. No influence but the influence of faith could ever have induced them to do it. Faith in God they must have had. And the New Testament informs us that they had. What do we read in that famous roll of the heroes of faith, Hebrews xi., but this, "BY FAITH THE WALLS OF JERICO FELL DOWN, AFTER THEY WERE COMPASSED ABOUT SEVEN DAYS! Not by engines of war, but by the direct power of God did these walls fall. And yet we may be sure that power would not have been put forth had not the command to compass the city been obeyed. And that command could not have been obeyed but by faith in God.

Here then we get to the root of the matter.

But, it may be asked, why then should there have been any fighting at all in this conquest of Canaan ? for there was fighting, and severe and difficult fighting too, after this. Indeed, after this extraordinary affair of Jericho, all the rest of the operations of the army, with rare exceptions, were similar to those of any other army. There was planning, and strategy, and tactics ; there was the watching for opportunities, and patient waiting ; there was daring courage and bold enterprise ; and thus the land was won ; God helping indeed, but by ordinary and not by extraordinary means ; not by miracle, but in answer to prayer, by strengthening the faculties of the general, his officers and his men.

In answer to this, it can only be said it pleased God that so it should be. And in saying this, we reach the very *ultima ratio* of the matter. Beyond this, no reasoning or supposition can go. But there is this to be said, that this incident, with those of the rest of the war, and of the crossing of the Jordan, all illustrate a great principle which is apparent in the whole of these Biblical narratives, viz., that Divine power is only put forth by way of miracle when it is really needed, and not put forth when human wisdom, courage, or knowledge are sufficient for the purpose. The Jordan could not be crossed at all at that season, unless its waters were drained off miraculously. The walls of Jericho could not be battered down by the host in their present condition. Divine power therefore made a breach in the walls.

But with Jericho taken, and a base of supplies and operations secured, the host was able to proceed to conquer the country exactly as any other army would proceed. Ordinary military measures, therefore, succeeded this extraordinary display of Divine power at Jericho. As that was the first instance of the kind in the operations of the army, so it was the last.

The display of Divine power in causing the walls to fall down was, however, calculated to bring about two much needed results, first, viz., to raise up the thoughts of the

host to Almighty God and cause them to have unshakeable trust in Him, now that He was so unmistakably beginning to fulfil his promise to *give them the land*. It was calculated also to inspire them with faith in Joshua as their leader, a most essential matter in military affairs. And this was expressly declared to be one of the objects of the miracles now being performed.

It was on the seventh day, and about the time of the last compassing of the city, that Joshua gave a strict command that none of the spoil of the city should be appropriated by any of the host, but that *all should come into the treasury of the Lord*. *The city, said the General, shall be accursed; or, as the word may be translated, shall be devoted; devoted, that is, to destruction.* But obviously gold, silver and brass cannot be destroyed. These, therefore, were reserved for the treasury of the house of the Lord. This was not a mere order of the general of an army, it was a command emanating from Almighty God, the supreme director of all the operations of the host. This command is important to be remembered in view of what shortly transpired.

It is noticeable that the city was compassed for *seven days*, and that on the *seventh day* it was compassed about, *seven times*. The seven-fold division of time was from the beginning, and so was the ordinance of every seventh day as the day of rest, the Sabbath. The seven-fold compassing of the city may have been on the rest-day only, as some think, or it may not. Conjecture is useless. But before the final passage round the city, strict charge was given that the house of Rahab was to be respected, and she and all her family saved. This charge was specially laid upon the two young men who had been spies, and who knew where to look for that sign of the covenant, the scarlet thread in the window. (Chap. vi., 22.)

So then, after the six days' compassing of the city, all being prepared, on the seventh day the last round of the seven-fold procession was made, the trumpets blew a long and loud blast, and the army, as commanded, gave a mighty shout, a shout of faith and confidence. Then the wall of the city crumbled down before them, making a great breach

by which the host went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city.

And now ensued one of those terrible scenes respecting which we would fain veil our eyes, and hold our breath. For the record is, not merely that combatants were killed in fighting, but that non-combatants were put to the sword too. *"They utterly destroyed all that were in the city, both man and woman, young and old, and ox and sheep and ass, with the edge of the sword."* But the young men that had been spies went in and brought out Rahab, and her father, and her mother, and her brethren, and all that she had.

Then, finally, *they burnt the city with fire, and all that was therein; only the silver and the gold, and the vessels of brass and of iron, they put into the treasury of the house of the Lord.*

With respect to all this, which seems at first sight to be a horrible and scandalous massacre, we cannot but notice that it was not done in a spirit of savage vengeance, like some of the massacres of besieged cities in other times. There was no thirst of blood, no wantonness of conquest, no outbreak of lust and abandoned wickedness, no horrible scenes such as have time and again attended the sack of a conquered city in modern times, nothing like the sacking of Seringabatam, or Badajos, or Constantinople.

The narrative rather gives the impression of a deed of judgment and retribution done in pursuance of stern duty, and in obedience to commands which were binding and must be obeyed. And as to the slaughter of the women, a reference to what took place with the women of Moab will give some clue to the reason why their lives were sacrificed as well as those of combatants. The people of the land were a people of gross and abandoned wickedness, and it may be conceived that the sparing of the women would only lead to an outbreak of licentiousness, which would demoralize the soldiers and endanger the whole enterprise. There was only too much of this in the expeditions of the Crusaders, as indeed might have been expected from the manner in which the vast multitudes were gathered together and marched through Europe. As to the children, they must inevitably share the fate of their mothers.

These remarks are not by way of justification or apology for the slaughter, for on the principle that underlies these studies, viz., that the narratives are true, that therefore this slaughter was in obedience to Divine commands, an apology or justification for the edicts of the Supreme would be impertinence. SHALL NOT THE JUDGE OF ALL THE EARTH DO RIGHT.

It is but a very little way that any man can see when endeavouring to penetrate the mystery of the Divine Government. We do not know enough to enable us to judge.

This is an absolutely sufficient answer to the reasoning of some, that the narrative cannot be true which attributes such terrible deeds to the command of an Almighty Sovereign, who is declared to be good; or that the Divine Being, who is revealed in Scripture is not a just and merciful being at all, but a cruel and merciless tyrant, and unworthy of honour and worship.

Such conclusions have been put forth in the name of reason; but in truth they are neither of them at all reasonable. We are not qualified to judge. A child of Abraham Lincoln might as well have concluded his father to be a monster of unparalleled cruelty for signing the declaration of war with the revolted states. The child might easily have learned after a year or two that that signing led to the slaughter of hundreds of thousands of soldiers, and to suffering and misery beyond conception. But the child could not possibly, until he became a man, understand the stern necessity which led so just and humane a man as Lincoln, to carry on such a dreadful war. Even so with ourselves. The wisest man that ever lived is but a little child in the presence of the great problems of human life and destiny, and of the Divine Government. It is the will of God. There you must leave it, and God has proved himself to be good in a thousand ways which we can perfectly understand. We may therefore have confidence where we do not understand.

Not only were all the inhabitants of Jericho put to the sword, but all the oxen and sheep and asses found within the limits of the city, suggesting that the people of the surrounding country had betaken themselves to the city, taking their cattle with them. Why the cattle should be destroyed it is impossible to say, unless to carry out fully the idea that the

place and everything in it, and belonging to it, were devoted to destruction.

And this idea finally found expression in the setting fire to the city and burning it up, with all that remained in it; Joshua finally pronouncing a curse upon the man who should rebuild it.

Thus ended this strange and terrible drama of the storming and destruction of Jericho; which nevertheless was rebuilt, and which became a considerable city, remaining such until the time of our Lord; some of the remarkable scenes of His life taking place there, such as the conversion of Zaccheus the Publican.*

NOTE AS TO THE WALLS OF JERICO.

*The present small village of Jericho, which has been much improved of late years, owing to the influx of tourists, undoubtedly occupies the site of the old city. For, in the first place, a beautiful stream of water, rising near the mountains and still called Elisha's spring (II. Kings ii. 19), flows through the whole of the ground where the village stands. This would naturally suggest that the city was on the same site. Then the ground itself is on a slight elevation above the surrounding plain. And what is very noticeable is the fact that on the southern side this elevation descends abruptly to the ground below, its appearance at this very day (for the writer has seen it), and the nature of the ground itself, naturally suggesting that along this ridge there extended in former ages the walls of a fortified city.

THE TRESPASS OF ACHAN.

(Chap. vii.)

But now a cloud of terrible darkness came over the army. After the unparalleled displays of Divine power in their behalf, had they not a right to expect that their march into the interior would be characterized by continuous victories? So it might seem. So the General certainly expected.

But, instead of this, their first experience was a grievous reverse, a defeat indeed, a rout with slaughter; and it is interesting to note how this calamity came about.

A grievous crime was committed by a prominent man of the tribe of Judah, in breaking that explicit command that nothing that was "devoted" should be taken as private

property. Alas! that demon of covetousness! that "*cursed thirst for gold*," (*auri sacra fames*) of which one of the ancients spoke, entered the heart of this man Achan. When he saw among the spoils a goodly Babylonish garment, two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold of fifty shekel's weight, he was tempted to take them; in fact, to steal them. And seeing that all these were for the Lord's treasury, as had been expressly proclaimed by the General, all having been warned not to touch anything thus devoted, his action was a robbing of God. The consequence was seen immediately. Joshua, pushing his way into the interior ascended through the pass leading up to the great central plateau of the country. The first place of note encountered by his army was Ai, a city not far from that place of famous memories, Bethel. Attacking Ai with a part of his force, a disastrous defeat and rout ensued. His soldiers fled before the men of Ai, who chased them in the descent of the pass, and returned to their city in triumph.

This event was so utterly unlike all that Joshua and his host had expected that they were completely unmanned. *The hearts of the people became as water.* Joshua fell prostrate before the Lord, stupefied and stunned; not so much at the loss of his men, and the repulse, for every army, even the most successful, suffers such reverses; but at the manifest turning away of the favour of their Sovereign Captain. Joshua, a man of faith, well knew that this was the very foundation of their enterprise, that without it they were ruined. And defeat was so utterly contrary to all he had said, and had been saying, and to all he had foretold would come to pass. His own army would lose confidence in him. And the Canaanites! How the news of this defeat would spread through the land, and inspire them with courage. And the Name of Jehovah; how it would be blasphemed and put to shame before them! Alas! the thought of it was unbearable. They had never been defeated before when they were pursuing the way marked out for them. What could this possibly mean? To Joshua it was the very blackness of darkness. (Chap. vii., 6 to 9.)

Thus he lay prostrate, apparently for hours, the elders with

him, pouring out his complaint in bitterness of soul before God, lying with clothes rent, and ashes upon his head.

Does this appear unmanly ? Is it unlike a great general ? Cannot a man like Joshua bear a slight reverse without being overwhelmed by it ? If so, he is not fit for his position.

But this was not an ordinary army, it was not governed by ordinary rules. The whole nation was a Divine organization. Their enterprise was of Divine direction. They had been told by Moses, speaking in God's name, that if they obeyed God's commands they would be uniformly successful. This defeat then must be a sign that God's favour had been withdrawn. What then had transpired ? Joshua knew nothing. The mass of the people knew nothing. All was mystery.

But after long lying in humiliation before God, the Divine voice was heard, testifying of a great wrong committed. There had been covetousness, robbery, concealment, and defiance of God's plain command as to the spoils. This curse must be rooted out before the Divine favour could return.

Then a command was given for a solemn inquisition, and a solemn preparation as before Sinai, to discover by whom the curse had come. The people, on the appointed day, assembled, doubtless with much fear and wonder as to what would be the issue. The Almighty Sovereign might then have communicated the name, and commanded Joshua to call out the person. But it pleased Him to have the discovery made with all accompanying solemnities. The revelation must be by lot. The lot was therefore cast first for the tribe, then for the family, then for the household, until finally, amid the breathless suspense of the multitude, Achan, of the tribe of Judah, was singled out as the man.

What he had done, none knew. Then the General, addressing the unfortunate man, exhorted to a full confession, which was made, and the stolen articles were found in his tent.

Then ensued a terrible scene. This was a strenuous period, when deep and abiding lessons needed to be stamped upon the heart and conscience of the people that would abide for all coming time. There seems to have been some sort

of conference as to what was to be done with the man, for, in this case, as in modern days, confession of crime could not do away with the penalty. It was concluded to take him, with all his spoil, *the silver, and the garment, and the wedge of gold, . . . and his oxen, and his asses, and his sheep, and his tent, and all that he had, yea, even his sons and his daughters* (strange to say), to a valley in the hilly region close by the encampment and there to put them to death by stoning. This was done, and the awful scene was closed by the whole being set on fire and a great heap of stones being raised, which remained up to the time when the narrative was written. . . .

It must be confessed that these are terrible events. But the times and the circumstances, were altogether dissimilar from those of a settled and orderly society where law would be administered and crime punished according to settled rules of jurisprudence. Stoning was peculiarly a punishment for blasphemy against God, and for idolatry, which was considered to be treason against God. And this terrible punishment inflicted upon Achan, was doubtless so severe because there was a robbery of God, and a defiance of God's express edict.

It is noticeable that though Achan's sons and daughters were punished with him, no mention is made of his wife. We cannot but conclude it possible that the sons and daughters must have sinned with the father, sinned knowingly and consciously, in helping to steal and hide the goods. It should, however, be mentioned, that a careful construction of the Hebrew suggests that while the sons and daughters were certainly taken to the valley of death, only Achan himself was stoned. (v. 25, 26.)

But as to Achan's wife, as she is not mentioned, she may not have been living; or, if living, she may have taken no part in the affair. Thus, naturally, she would escape.

The narrative concludes with the words, "*So the Lord turned from the fierceness of his anger.*" Wherefore the name of that place was called, *The Valley of Achor, or Trouble*, to this day.

NOTE TO CHAPTER VII.

It seems, at first sight, strange, and not equitable or reasonable, that disaster should befall the whole host, because one man and his family had done wrong. *The anger of the Lord, we are told, was kindled against the children of Israel, because of this man's sin.* Why against the children of Israel? Moses, on the occasion of the rebellion of Korah, had been commanded to stand aside that God might consume the whole congregation. Then falling on his face, he cried out in an agony, *O God, the God of the spirits of all flesh, shall one man sin, and wilt Thou be wroth with all the congregation?* Doubtless, He who could search the heart and spirit of these people, discerned a rebellious spirit in them all, sympathising with Korah and his rebellion.

But on this occasion, not the least sign appears of anything of the kind.

To what then can be attributed this "sierce wrath" against the whole host on the occasion of Achan's transgression? A question easier to ask than to answer. Certainly the way of God is at times, *in the deep.* His judgments cannot be found out. There are occasions when men must stand in awe, and commune with their own hearts, and be still.

But it does seem—if we may venture to imagine a reason where none is given—as if, in the Divine dealing with this people, they were looked upon as so strongly bound together as a separate and peculiar nation, that the act of one family, and sometimes of one individual, was dealt with as the act of all. That this principle now pervades all the dealings of the nations with one another so far as official persons are concerned, is well known. An insult to an ambassador, though only committed by one person, is judged to be an insult to a nation. And if the person insulting is an official person, then it is considered to be an insult by one nation to another, and may be followed by a desolating war. In this war thousands of lives may be sacrificed, homes desolated, countries ravaged, untold horrors superinduced, all by the act of one or two persons of whom those who suffer never heard.

Thus it is in the modern life of nations. And, apparently, in the Divine dealing with this Hebrew people, the whole congregation, at times, were dealt with as responsible, though only one, or only a few, persons committed the wrong. The effect of this upon the conduct of each individual could hardly fail to be of a highly restraining character when there was any temptation to do wrong.

AS TO THE FALLING OF THE WALLS OF JERICHO.

There is no need for supposing that the whole of the walls of the city fell down, in every part. The same Almighty power that made any part fall down, could make the whole fall down. But there was no need for this. All that was needed was for a wide breach to be made, wide enough to admit an entrance to the army. And this was doubtless the event. This would entirely obviate the difficulty experienced by some in conceiving how Rahab and her family could be saved. For if the whole of the walls fell, her house being on the wall, she and her house would have perished. But doubtless the falling was only partial. So she could easily be found and preserved.

CHAPTER V.

THE CAPTURE OF AI AND THE SURROUNDING COUNTRY ; THE SOLEMN COVENANT ; THE DEFEAT OF THE FIVE KINGS ; THE ADDRESS TO THE SUN AND MOON.—Joshua viii., ix. and x.

After the fiery trial of chastening through which the host had passed, and their severe purgation from evil, words of comfort and encouragement were now spoken. As the prophet in a later age was commanded to comfort Israel and cry unto her that "*her iniquity was pardoned*," that *she had received double for her sins* (Isaiah xl., 1, 2) so now the Lord spoke to Joshua, saying, *Fear not. I have given into thy hand the king of Ai, and his people, and his city, and his land !*

With this assurance Joshua proceeded to organize an attack in ordinary military style, exactly as any other commander might do, laying his plans carefully, arranging a night march, an ambush, a feigned attack, a pretended flight (like that of William the Norman at Hastings) a rush of the host into the city through the open gates and the capturing it. The first attack had been in an unfortunate spirit of vain confidence and depreciation of the enemy (always a fatal blunder) and at the instance of the men who had been sent up to examine the place. "Let not all the people labor thither," they said (alluding to the very toilsome ascent of some three thousand feet up the pass) *let about two or three thousand go up, for they, the people of Ai, are but few.* Joshua too hastily accepted their report, and the result was defeat; a defeat brought about naturally, and yet working out God's plan of chastisement.

But now, with all possible care and circumspection, the attack was planned and conducted, and success crowned the efforts of the army.

This time, Joshua took his whole force. The march up the pass was made by night ; a large number of the host

went completely round Ai, and posted themselves in ambush beyond it. This the hilly nature of the country easily enabled them to do. A much smaller force remained in sight of the city, Joshua keeping with this force as having the most difficult work to do, viz., to feign an attack, to draw out the besieged to follow them through the open gates of the city, to pretend to fly, and then, at the right moment, when the men in ambush had risen (at a signal given by Joshua), and entered the city, to turn and attack the men of Ai, driving them back until they would meet the soldiers who had entered the city. Thus the men of Ai found themselves between two hosts and were utterly routed. The narrative of the battle represents the Divine Captain of the host as looking on in superintendence, and as giving the signal through Joshua stretching out his spear for the men in ambush to rise. Joshua could easily be seen across the intervening valley standing on a height and stretching out his spear, and so everything went on as had been planned, which is not always the case in an attack. But that it did, proves both the wisdom of the plan, and the discipline and courage of the army.

The Divine command was that Ai should be treated as Jericho had been treated. It was set on fire, and everything that breathed in it was put to the sword, only at this time the cattle found in it were saved. Thus it was made a heap and a desolation "*to this day*" as the narrator adds—no doubt writing not many years after the event.

One incident is related that seems to savour of barbarous revenge, rather than of sober triumph. The king, or as we would perhaps call him, the mayor, of the city, fell into the hands of the attacking force alive, and Joshua caused him to be hanged on a tree.

So far as the mere putting to death is concerned there is no more pain in being hanged on a tree than in being slain with a sword. And, indeed, the man who is instantaneously put to death by hanging suffers infinitely less than the man who is wounded, and dies after hours of exposure on the field of battle. But there is beyond doubt an opprobrium attaching to it which makes the thought of it repulsive in a high degree. So it is now. So it was in the time of Moses,

as is evidenced by the sentence (Deut. xxi., 23) *he that is hanged on a tree is accursed of God*. Thus then we arrive at the reason of Joshua's action. Jericho and all it contained was accursed; Ai and all it contained was accursed. To make this perfectly understood the chief magistrate of Ai was hanged on a tree. The whole land, and its whole inhabitants, were under a sentence of condemnation pronounced by the Supreme Ruler of all the nations of the earth. The reason, and righteousness of it have already been fully discussed. But we shall require to bear this fundamental fact in mind as we proceed with the events of this momentous campaign.

After this event, we have the record of the celebration on the opposing mountains, Ebal and Gerizim, of that very striking ceremony of pronouncing the blessings and the cursings detailed at length in the latter part of the Book of Deuteronomy. (Chap. 27, 28.)

It has been supposed by some critics that this transaction took place at a later period, and is related here for some purpose not very apparent, although the actual event transpired when all the central portion of the land had been subdued. For, it is said, how could Joshua have carried the great host, with all their baggage and train, and many women and children, to such a distance in a country occupied by the enemy. And how could he have secured the time necessary to build an altar, place the priests and Levites in position, have the curses and blessings recited, and then read the whole law of Moses in the hearing of the people, unless there was unbroken peace in all the region round about? all which seems very plausible.

But after all, the difficulties imagined to exist in supposing that this transaction took place immediately after the conquest of Ai are more apparent than real. For, in the first place, let it never be forgotten that this host was under Divine guidance and protection. Next that it was no great distance from the neighbourhood of Ai, not more than a day's march over a comparatively easy country, to the cultivated valley of Shechem, where the host could easily establish themselves and rest for a few days. At Shechem, with

Mount Gerizim on one side of the valley and Mount Ebal on the other, all that is described could be done in a very short time, if, indeed, a permanent lodgment was not effected in that historically famous spot, so long the dwelling place of their father Jacob.

And as to the fear of attack, with such an armed host as Joshua had, flushed with the victory of Ai and disposed doubtless in the valley so as to protect the priests and the Levites, considering also the fear and awe that had come upon the people of the land, it was to the last degree unlikely that they would be molested. Indeed, their Divine Protector would take care that they should not be, while engaged in His service on this occasion of high solemnity.

And it was most natural that their entrance into the land should be signalized as early as possible by the restoration of the worship of the God of Israel. Many ages before, their ancestors, Abraham and Jacob, had erected altars in this very region they now occupied. The altar of Bethel could never be forgotten; the altar at Shechem, near the famous well where Jacob watered his flocks; the hill sides where Joseph wandered in search of his brethren; all these were round about them, all full of memories of the worship and Divine experiences of former days. For hundreds of years the land had been wholly given up to debasing idolatry and wickedness. No altar to Jehovah, but hundreds of altars to the cruel and wicked gods and goddesses of the nations were to be found from one end of the land to the other. And now, the descendants of Jacob once more appeared on the scene, with a mission from God to purge the land.

Fitting it was, therefore, that as soon as it was possible for them to make their way to these sacred mountains, Ebal and Gerizim, flanking the vale of Shechem, an altar should be built to "*Jehovah, the Almighty One of Israel.*" Note the care with which the injunctions as to altar-building are followed: "*As Moses the servant of the Lord commanded the children of Israel, as it is written in the book of the law of Moses, an altar of whole stones over which no man hath lifted up iron.*" Thus was the altar built. (Exodus xx., 25.) And they offered thereon burnt offerings unto the Lord, and

sacrificed peace offerings! Thus was the worship of Almighty God restored in this land of their fathers.

Then, on some of the stones of the mountain side, Joshua engraved the words of the Ten Commandments, thus asserting the Divine sovereignty over the land. Afterwards there was witnessed, for the first time, that most striking scene of the calling from mountain to mountain by priests and Levites of the blessings and cursings as directed by the Lord by his servant. (Deut. xxvii., 11, 12, 13.)

For all Israel, and their elders and officers, and their judges, stood on this side the ark, and on that side, before the priests, the Levites, which bore the ark of the covenant of the Lord, as well the stranger as he that was born among them; half of them over against Mount Gerizim, and half of them over against Mount Ebal, as Moses the servant of the Lord had commanded before, that they should bless the people Israel.

Finally, Joshua read all the words of the law, the blessings and the cursings in the hearing of the people, reading all that Moses had commanded. And it is added that the women and the little ones also were present. (Chap. viii., 30-35.)

It can scarcely have been possible for all the women and children of the nation to have come so far from the camp in the Jordan plain. Probably a sufficient number were taken there to form a representation of the whole, so that on this first occasion of the great solemnity, not only the soldiers, but all classes and orders of the people might be there in person or by their representatives, that so the whole assembly of Israel might appear before God and one another, and hear as if from Sinai itself, the words of the law.

The device by which the inhabitants of Gibeon, a city not far from Ai, deceived Joshua, and obtained promise of their lives is told in Chap. ix., v. 3 to end. It does not speak much for the watchfulness of the host that by such a simple device they were deceived. These men disguised themselves and made themselves look like men who had travelled from a great distance, taking *old sacks on their asses, and old wine bottles, leathern bottles, rent and sewed up, and old shoes and*

clouded upon their feet, *old garments* also being upon them and dry and mouldy bread in their sacks.

It is significantly added that the host, in this matter, *asked not counsel of the Lord*. Thus they fell into a snare, as many a man has done since who acted hastily and without asking divine direction.

For, it is a universal truth, true of these times as well as of all that have gone before, that *the Lord giveth wisdom*. Thus spake the wise Jewish king, as it is recorded in the book of Proverbs (Proverbs ii., 6), and his words are emphasized and enlarged by one of the Apostles of our Lord, "*If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all men liberally and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him.*" (James i., 5.) And let it never be forgotten that Christ is made unto them that trust in him not only righteousness, but wisdom.

The people of Gibeon thus succeeded in persuading Joshua to make an alliance with them. But the princes of the congregation, on finding out the cheat, remembered the strict command that no league should be made with the people of the land, and were evidently afraid. But they had sworn, and like the honest man pictured by the Psalmist, who changes not, though he has sworn to his own hurt, they said "*we will not touch them. Let them live, but let them be hewers of wood and drawers of water unto all the congregation.*" And so they became.

THE UPRISING OF THE CANAANITISH PRINCES.

But now the petty kings and rulers of the tribes inhabiting the land became thoroughly alarmed, and naturally they made a league, such as would be called in these times an offensive and defensive alliance. This league comprised all the kings of Lebanon, in the north, down to the extreme southern border towards the wilderness. For such a small territory, not larger than two or three counties of England, or Canada, or the United States, it is extraordinary what a number of independent tribes and governments there were in it. The country was populous. There were numerous towns and cities, many of which, in some form or other,

remain to this day. But every city seems to have had an independent government. And this was not simply a municipal government, such as we find in modern towns and cities, but a government complete in itself, with no central authority over it, and capable by itself of making war, declaring peace, levying taxes, and forming alliances.

Gibeon, indeed, was a government of four cities, all contiguous, but united under one head, viz., Gibeon, Chephirah, Beeroth, Kirjath Jearim, the first and last well known places in after history and subsisting now.

Jerusalem also, and Hebron, Lachish, Eglon, Jarmuth, had each of them an independent rule and king. These were all inhabited by that nation of Amorites whose iniquities had cried to heaven, and made their land an abomination.

Their government resembled that of the earlier days of Greece, when Athens, Sparta, Thebes, were each the centre of independent governments, sometimes at war with one another, and sometimes acting together when threatened by a foreign enemy like the Persians, or by a powerful prince amongst themselves, like Philip of Macedon.

Thus these cities of the Canaanitish tribes, each of them a centre of independent government, in time of common danger, formed confederacies.

But, as is often the case, the confederacy at this time did not at once direct its strength against the invading host, but against the traitorous members of their own race and nation. They declared war against Gibeon. Immediately, the new and powerful allies of Gibeon were appealed to. "*Slack not thy hand,*" thus ran the message to Joshua, "*from thy servants; come up to us quickly and save us, and help us, for all the kings of the Amorites that dwell in the mountains are gathered together against us.*"

Joshua responded to the appeal at once. He was at the camp at Gilgal, down far below on the plain by the Jordan. And he was cheered by a Divine word, *Fear them not, I have delivered them into thine hand.*

Thus encouraged, he made a swift night march up through the pass leading to the higher country where the confederate cities were, attacked sharply and suddenly at day-break at Gibeon, a few miles from Jerusalem, which at that time was

only a small unimportant hill-fort. The confederates were defeated, driven down the descent leading towards the plain (afterwards called the plain of Sharon) and their discomfiture was made the more complete by a tremendous storm of hail with hailstones of unusual size. *For there were more which died with hailstones than they whom the children of Israel slew with the sword.* The battle evidently took place early in the day, before the sun was high in the heavens, and while the moon was still visible in the western sky.

It was then that Joshua breathed out the prayer that the day might last long, and that the light of the moon might continue so that their enemies might not have time to escape in the darkness, their hosts dispersing and entering as non-combatants into their own cities, exactly as the tribes of India do when defeated. Lord Roberts has told us how the swarms of tribesmen whom he encountered in the neighbourhood of Cabul disappeared like magic after a repulse, so that in a district that but yesterday bristled with armed hosts, nothing but peaceful laborers were to be seen. The Boer war has been fruitful in the same incidents.

So it was in these wars of Joshua, and of Israel long after his time. We may be astonished at the numbers who are reported as taking the field, until we remember that in such campaigns the whole male population capable of bearing arms would go out; the season of the year being chosen for fighting when agricultural labour was suspended.

This was why Joshua earnestly desired the day to be prolonged, a desire which reminds us strongly of an exclamation of the great Duke at Waterloo, when towards the end of that long and terrible day, his men almost exhausted by desperate fighting, he exclaimed, "Oh, for night, or Blucher!"

No poet has caught up the exclamation of the Duke, but a poet of the Hebrews (and we know how the poetic spirit was occasionally manifested in those times) has seized upon Joshua's prayer as a groundwork for a sublime apostrophe to the sun and moon to stand still.

This poetic passage, quoted from a well-known book of the time, the Book of Jasher, is embodied in the narrative, as

the narration states, with regard to which see note at the end of the chapter.

The narrative then goes on to tell of the flight of the five kings, and their hiding in a cave in Makkedah. The scene of this conflict was in the mountainous passes that lie between Jerusalem and the sea, a region that became subsequently famous in the wars of the time of Saul and David, and through which the railway to Jerusalem now runs. It abounds with caves, as travellers on this road must notice. The kings were discovered and brought out. The captains of the Hebrew host, in sight of all the people, were then commanded to put their feet on the necks of these chiefs, not in a spirit of barbarous exultation (for that was far from Joshua), but as an object-lesson, a type and symbol of the fact that the powers and princes of the land were given up by God to the Israelitish people.

They were then dealt with as the king of Ai had been before, and hanged on five trees, and for the same reason.

For some time after this, the captain of the Hebrew host went on capturing city after city in the ordinary course of military operations, first in the region between Jerusalem and the sea, then southward along the coast where the Philistines afterwards dwelt; then ascending through the passes of the hills to Hebron, and subduing all the southern country as far as that place of famous memories, Kadesh Barnea, in the wilderness. Thus from the southern desert, northward to the centre of the land at Shechem, all was subdued before him.

These expeditions, however, probably occupied several years.

NOTE

ON THE ADJURATION OF JOSHUA TO THE SUN AND MOON TO STAND STILL.

The passage with respect to this, viz., that of Joshua x., 12, 13, 14, is a peculiar one in this respect, that it purports to be an extract or quotation from the book of JASHER, as another passage, in the Book of Numbers, is stated to be taken from the book of the WARS OF THE LORD.

Both these passages are poetical in character, and both books seem to have been of the nature of the warlike songs or odes cele-

brating the deeds of the heroes of the nation. But neither the book of Jasher nor the book of the Wars of the Lord has been preserved as a portion of Divine revelation. And it is evident that neither of them was divinely inspired, although their contents might be worthy of being referred to in the sacred canon.

To some who have studied the passage it is considered to be a narrative of an actual event. And certainly, so far as Divine power is concerned, it would be as easy to arrest the ordinary motion of the earth for a day, as to cause the walls of Jericho to fall, or the flood of Jordan to be arrested.

But on the other hand it is argued that there was no absolute necessity for such a putting forth of Divine power, as there was in the case of the Jordan and of Jericho, and that it is more conformable to the general analogy of Scripture to consider the passage as poetical, and to be of the same character as those which describe the mountains as "*skipping like rams*" (Psalm cxiv.), or the Almighty Deliverer as *riding upon a cherub and flying to the help of His servant upon the wings of the wind* (Psalm xviii.). And it is pointed out, in support of the view that the passage is wholly poetical, that it describes, not Almighty God, but Joshua as commanding the sun and moon to stand still. That Joshua could give such a command is deemed to be incredible as a fact, though allowable enough as a poetic imagination.

Moreover, as a proof that the book of Jasher was uninspired, it is pointed out that its last paragraph utters what is entirely at variance with all Scripture, viz., that there was no day like that, before it or after it, *that the Lord hearkened to the voice of a man!*

It is also noticed that no reference to this event is ever made in any other part of the Old Testament except in a highly poetical and imaginative chapter in one of the prophets (Habakkuk iii., 11), while the New Testament is silent upon it altogether, although mention is made of the falling of the walls of Jericho.

The upholders of this view consider that it expresses Joshua's earnest desire and longing that the day might last long enough to complete the destruction of their enemies, even as Agamemnon is represented in the Iliad as praying to the gods that the day might not end until he had completed the sack of Troy.

CHAPTER VI.

THE COMPLETION OF THE CONQUEST OF THE LAND ; ITS
DIVISION AMONGST THE TRIBES AND OTHER INCIDENTS.—
Joshua xi. to xxii.

After the conquest of the southern and central portions of the land had been completed, a great league of the chiefs of the extreme north was formed. And here, for the first time, and very naturally, we hear of horses and chariots as part of the warlike equipment of the opposing forces. It is noticeable that after the first few events of the campaign of Joshua, we read no more of miraculous interposition. There is no more of compassing walls by priests, and their fall by miracle, no more of crossing rivers whose waters had been caused to drain off by Divine power. The campaign went on from city to city, from district to district, exactly as the campaigns of modern times do. Victories were won by superior generalship and courage, and the only Divine interference was to strengthen the mind and will of the General by such words as were spoken to him when he went out to meet the formidable northern host, *Then the Lord said to Joshua, making special reference to this equipment of cavalry, "Be not afraid of them ; for to-morrow about this time will I deliver them up all slain before Israel ; thou shalt hough their horses, and burn their chariots with fire."* There is nothing miraculous about this word to Joshua ; it is just such a word as many a godly soldier, sailor, merchant, ambassador, has heard when communing with God before entering upon some great and difficult enterprise in these times ; some Gustavus Adolphus, some Hampden, or Cromwell, some Gordon, or Stonewall Jackson, some Columbus, Mungo Park, or Livingstone.

Depending upon God's promise of help, Joshua organized his force, marched to the spot where the allied hosts were encamped by the waters of Merom, north of the Sea of

Galilee, near the sources of the Jordan, fell upon them suddenly, just as Caesar or Napoleon would have done, and defeated them with great slaughter. *The Lord delivered them into the hand of Israel*, just as the Scottish army was delivered to Cromwell's force at Dunbar. (Chap. xi., 6 to 9.)

Following up this victory, Joshua passed through all the northern portion of the land, taking city after city, and town after town; doing with the inhabitants as he had done with the inhabitants of Ai and Jericho; but setting on fire only one of them, Hazor, which was the head of this northern confederacy. *For, as it is said, it was of the Lord to harden their hearts that they should come against Israel in battle*; this hardening the heart being evidently like that of Pharaoh, a simply leaving them alone, to follow out their natural inclination, and so bring on their own destruction.

Amongst the tribes that Joshua subdued were those giant-like men, the Anakims, the men whose appearance had so frightened the bulk of the spies when they first explored the country. These dwellers in the fastnesses of the southern mountains were nearly all cut off, but a few remained in the plain, in the cities of the Philistines, Gaza and Gath, and Ashdod, and were doubtless incorporated in time with the Philistine people. The famous Goliath of Gath, the giant slain by David, may well have been of this race. But though these Philistines occupied the region by the sea coast, and there remained here and there portions unsubdued, the active warlike operations of Joshua now ceased, and the land rested from war, many years doubtless having elapsed since the host had crossed the Jordan.

THE SURVEY AND DIVISION OF THE LAND.

For Joshua was old and stricken in years, and there still remained the great work to be done, which it was desirable to do in his life-time, of dividing the land amongst the tribes. This was done by lot. But before it could be done, there was a necessity for an accurate survey of the various parts of the country, and some observation of what might be the natural boundary lines of each tribe. It is impossible to say

exactly how it came to pass that the boundary of each tribe was fixed as it was, for in many cases the lines were as purely arbitrary as the boundary lines of the counties of England, or of many States of the Union.

But a survey was made, as we shall see later on; divided they were, and the division was accepted without a murmur, although the lot of some of the tribes was far superior to that of others. In the progress of the division and during the remainder of the life of Joshua, some interesting events transpired. (Chap. xiv., 6 to end.)

For example, his old friend and companion, Caleb, who has disappeared from the scene of action altogether for many years, though a man of eminent faith in God, now appears before Joshua to claim the inheritance which Moses long before had promised him. Touching it is to hear this old man refer to the former days, when he and Joshua stood alone in their faith, while all the rest were unbelieving and faint-hearted, and to hear the reason why he was so bold and confident, viz., that *he wholly followed the Lord his God*. Many a man in these times, with a difficult enterprise in hand, in connection either with that sphere of secular life to which it has pleased God to call him, or with the things of God's kingdom, may be strengthened and uplifted by the words of this saint of the old time.*

*Entire consecration is a doctrine much dwelt upon in these days, and in substance rightly. For that is the duty and calling of every follower of Jesus Christ; and not merely a counsel of perfection for the few. To call this the "higher life" is a misnomer. It is the only true life of a Christian. It scarcely seems desirable to put it forth as a sort of second step in the Christian walk. It is, or should be, the first step. The surrender of the will to God through Jesus Christ is the very foundation of Christian discipleship.

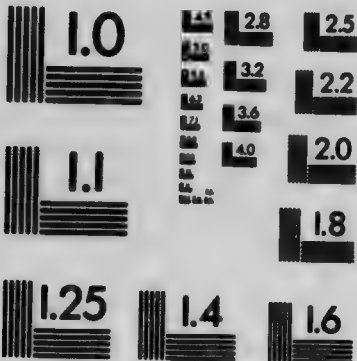
In the liturgy of the Church of England this idea of entire consecration is made prominent and emphatic. The general absolution exhorts to prayer, *that the rest of our life may be pure and holy*. The Te Deum contains a prayer that we may be kept this day *without sin*. The second Collect at Evening Prayer, a petition that our hearts may be *set to obey God's commands*; the Thanksgiving, a petition that we may shew forth our thanks by *giving up ourselves to God's service*; and the office for the Communion contains a solemn dedication and offering to God of *body and soul*, to be a "reasonable, holy and lively sacrifice."

Indeed, in the nature of things, it is evident that only a "following of the Lord fully," as this good old saint did, can be acceptable to God.



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The sequel of this little story is very beautiful. *"I am this day,"* said this old companion of Joshua, *"fourscore and five years old ; as yet I am as strong this day as in the day that Moses sent me ; as my strength was then, even so it is now. . . . Now, therefore, give me this mountain,* (meaning the hill round about Hebron). *Thou heardest how that the Anakims were there ; . . . if so be that the Lord will be with me, then I shall be able to drive them out.* (This took place while these Anakims were still to be found in the hill country.)

So Joshua helped him ; and Hebron became the inheritance of Caleb to this day, as the narrator added.

Caleb, then, old as he was, behaved like a valiant soldier, and himself drove out some of the families of the Anakim. Then, proceeding to Kirjath-Sepher, he gave a challenge to the young men round about him in his tribe of Judah, that whoever should take and smite the city should have his daughter to wife. The gage of battle was won by a nephew of Caleb, Othneil, and we cannot help suspecting that these two cousins had known and loved one another before, and that love for the daughter nerved the heart and the arm of the nephew, and had much to do with his taking the city (Chap. xv., 16). Her name was Acksah, and she was evidently a provident and thoughtful wife. Caleb had settled a portion of his territory upon the married couple, but the daughter, on examining it, found it deficient in water.

She very naturally approached her father through her husband, but the father, just as naturally desired to see his daughter herself. *"What would'st thou ?"* he said to her ; she answered, *"Give me a blessing ;"* (a curious use of the word "blessing," but evidently meaning a mark of kindness) *"for thou hast given me a south land, give me also springs of water. . . . And he gave her the upper springs and the nether springs."*

Invaluable gifts these, in that southern region, and doubtless the father made his daughter happy by the gift, as many a father has done since by gifts to a favored daughter.

After the narration of this pretty idyl, there is a list, in perfect detail, of all the cities and villages in the territory

of Judah. (Chap. xv., 20 and on.) The list comprises no less than one hundred and nine cities and towns, *with their villages*. This peculiarity of the nomenclature is remarkable. Thus after mentioning a variety of names of places, the first portion of the list sums up, *all the cities are twenty-nine with their villages*; then again, *fourteen cities with their villages*; and further on, *Ekron with her towns and villages*; *all that lay near Ashdod with their villages*; *Gaza with her towns and villages*, the last being all in the Philistine country; yet allotted to Judah. Very many of these places appear again in the subsequent story; indeed, this little territory of Judah has been the scene of more remarkable events than perhaps any similar piece of territory on the face of the earth, if we include Jerusalem. No spot on earth can compare with it, not even Rome and the region round about that world-dominating city. The events of the New Testament surely demonstrate this.

The enumeration gives the impression of a country of a very dense population. There are large numbers of cities *with their villages*; and other cities, *with their towns and villages*. What the exact import of these terms is, as to the number of the population of the city, the town, or the village, it is impossible at this distance of time to say, or even to conjecture. But one thing is certain, that Palestine is a country capable of supporting a very large population even now, if well governed, and there is no reason to imagine it to have been less able then.*

For we must bear in mind that, abandoned to wickedness as the land of the Canaanites was, this by no means precludes the idea of their being well versed in the arts and developments of civilization. Rome in her imperial days was as wicked as Sodom, and Sodom may have been as civilized as Rome.

*Following the course of the railway from Jaffa, through the plain and the mountains, up to Jerusalem (as the writer did in the spring of 1901), one cannot but notice the number of hillsides all terraced for vines, which terraces are now in a condition of decay and ruin, no population being near them. There must at one time have been a large number of villages in these valleys and on the hill sides, villages which have long ago disappeared, during the times of desolation.

The tribe of Judah had a far larger extent of territory than any other tribe, and it included all the country of the Philistines, extending from the sea to the hills. This, however, was not fully conquered till many years afterwards. The density of population, as evidenced by the number of towns and villages, may enable us to understand how such numbers of armed men could turn out to battle, especially when we consider, as has been already pointed out, that an army in the field at that time was often composed of every man capable of bearing arms, in the tribe or region.

A curious circumstance is related of JERUSALEM, viz., that the Jebusites, who inhabited it, were strong enough in this rocky fastness in the hills, to defy all the efforts of the tribe of Judah to dispossess them. And it continued in possession of this tribe of Canaanites until the time of Saul and David.

Another noticeable circumstance of this time of dividing the land was the claim of the daughters of a chief of the tribe of Manasseh, to share the inheritance of their father, he having no sons. This claim was brought before the High Priest, and before Joshua, and was allowed.* (Chap. xvii., 3, 4.)

This tribe of Manasseh, like the tribe of Judah, was not able to drive out the Canaanites that remained; one reason for which was that the Canaanites had chariots of iron. Yet this inability did not prevent them from vaunting,—a true touch of human nature. The descendants of Joseph, comprising the tribes of Manasseh and Ephraim, complained that their lot was not large enough. "*I am a great people,*" they said; to which Joshua replied, if thou be a great people, then get thee up to the woods and conquer more territory for thyself. (Chap. xvii, 17.)

It was to this challenge that they replied, rather in cowardly fashion, that the Canaanites dwelling in the valley had chariots of iron. Then Joshua replied to them, "*Th...*"

* The position of women in Old Testament times has sometimes been ignorantly supposed to be little better than that of slaves, and analogous to that prevailing at this day in Mohammedan countries. Careful consideration of the record will utterly dissipate this supposition.

art a great people, and hast great power," (a touch of sarcasm is evident here, as coming after their complaint about the iron chariots). Yet, he goes on, evidently not in sarcasm, but with the sincerest good-will, *"Thou shalt not have one lot only ; but the mountain shall be thine ; for it is a wood, and the outgoings of it shall be thine ; for thou shalt drive out the Canaanites, though they have iron chariots, and though they be strong!"*

Here speaks the man of faith ; the valiant leader of the host of God. Who could not fight and overcome with such a captain as that ?

And, as these battles and campaigns of Joshua are types of the conflicts of the Church of God in Christian times, so these words of the Hebrew leader may well be for the encouragement of the sorely tried Christian soldier ; the faithful pastor, bishop, missionary, teacher, in fighting against the forces of the god of this world and his emissaries, the powers of heathenism, atheism, falsehood, vice, sensuality, and all manner of sin.

And often in the stress of conflict can these cheering words be heard with the ear of faith, spoken by the Captain of our salvation: *"The mountain shall be thine ; and the outgoings of it shall be thine. For thou shalt drive out the Canaanites, though they have iron chariots, and though they be strong."*

THE SLAYING UP OF THE TABERNACLE. (Chapter xviii.)

Although the Canaanites were not wholly driven out, the land by this time became sufficiently at rest to permit of such an important act being performed as the erection of the Tabernacle. The place chosen was not Jerusalem ; that was still in possession of a Canaanitish tribe. It was at Shiloh, a town in the very centre of the land, about twenty miles north of Jerusalem, and on the highway from north to south, in a spot that must have repeatedly been passed by Abraham and Jacob in their many wanderings over the land. At Shiloh, then, the Tabernacle was set up, and there

it remained for the most part until Jerusalem was conquered, when it was removed to that city.

It is somewhat curious that no narrative is left us of the circumstances attending so great an event as the formal establishment of the worship of Jehovah in the land, and the institution of that marvellous sacrificial and ceremonial system which was to subsist for fifteen hundred years until it was all fulfilled in the life and death of the Son of God.

THE SURVEY OF THE LAND.

It has been already observed that before the allocation of the territory amongst all the tribes could take place some accurate survey of the land must have been made. Such a survey took place, by Joshua's direction, as soon as the land was quiet enough to permit of it. In Chapter xviii. there is an interesting account of this journey. "*How long are ye slack to go and possess the land? Give out from among you three men of each tribe, and I will send them and they shall rise and go through the land and describe it according to the inheritance of it.*"

And the men arose, and went away, and Joshua charged them, saying, *Go and walk through the land and describe it, and come again to me.* (Describe it evidently means, Draw plans and descriptions of it.) They fulfilled their mission faithfully. They had been directed by Divine power to divide the land into seven parts (Judah and the house of Joseph having received their inheritance by this time). This they did, and having passed through the land *they described it by cities into seven parts in a Book*, and returned to Joshua and the host at Shiloh. Thus there was an anticipation of the Domesday Book of England; a full record of every city, town, and village in the country, and all the land round about each. The contents of this famous book are summarized in the remainder of Chapter xviii., and the whole of Chapter xix., wherein is described the boundary line of each of the remaining tribes, and all the cities therein, with their villages.

Then Joshua cast lots for them in Shiloh *before the Lord*,

making of it a solemn religious ceremony. No murmuring or fault finding arose in connection with the division ; all were satisfied ; no attempt was ever made to alter the boundaries then established, and they remained as then fixed, till the final breaking up of the Hebrew kingdom, when almost the whole of what remained of the nation was carried captive to Babylon.

The final act of this division was a very touching one. We read in Chapter xix.: "*When they had made an end of dividing the land for inheritance by their coasts, the Children of Israel gave an inheritance to Joshua the son of Nun among them ; according to the word of the Lord, they gave him the city which he asked, even Timnath-serah, in Mount Ephraim, and he built the city and dwelt therein.*" (v. 49, 50)

A great and heroic soul ! Free from selfishness, he waits till the very last, till all the tribes had their territory, till every family had its land, before asking anything for himself ;—a noble example to all in high position, and one that has been followed by some, as both sacred and profane history testify, to the credit of human nature be it said.—Yet far more often have we seen men like him,—yea, and men of high and commanding genius in statesmanship and war, covetous of reward and greedy after gain, angry if gain is withheld, and seeking to come first, not last, in the rewards and honors of success.

In this willingness to take the last place how does this great captain remind us of the Captain of our Salvation, who came *not to be ministered unto but to minister*, and of whom it is so nobly said,—that *He pleased not Himself!*—though all the world belonged to Him !

CHAPTER VII.

THE APPOINTMENT OF THE CITIES OF REFUGE AND OTHER INCIDENTS.—Joshua xx to end.

The command to set certain places apart as CITIES OF REFUGE was given to Moses along with the rest of the laws and ordinances by the Divine Ruler, while the host was encamped at Sinai.

The idea underlying the appointment of these cities was undoubtedly, in the first place, the sacredness of the life of man. The original ordinance that was given at the foundation of the new world, after the flood, still subsisted: "*Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: At the hand of every man's brother will I require the life of man.*" The responsibility is here put upon every community to care for the life of each one of its members. But out of the members of every community, the brethren, the relatives, the close connections of any slain man are evidently to be held accountable first. This idea of the responsibility of every community for the life of its members has taken so firm a hold of the experience of mankind that it has survived even to these days, and been embodied in our modern jurisprudence. When any person dies suddenly, and there is reason to suspect the death is by the hand of another, a formal enquiry in course of law is required to be held, presided over by a judicial officer appointed for the purpose. The coroner's inquest of our times is a recognition—according to the very instincts of human nature—of the idea that society has responsibility for the life of its members.

In these early times, before the establishment of regular courts, it was apparently the custom for *every family* to guard the life of its members. The Mosaic law did not abolish the custom. The avenger of the blood of a slain relative still had his function. But the law given by Moses made a provision by which one who has occasioned the death of another by inadvertence could find a sanctuary and place of refuge to flee

to. Cities were set apart, three on each side of the Jordan, for this purpose. But to guard against the refuge being abused, it was provided that if the death had been occasioned by design, no refuge should avail the murderer. A great abuse that sprang up in medieval times, that of abbeys and monasteries being used to shelter notorious criminals, was thus guarded against. (Exodus xxi., 14.)

During the life of Moses the respective cities were not designated; only the general command was given, "*When ye be come over Jordan into the land of Canaan, then ye shall appoint. . . . three cities on this side Jordan (that is, on the eastern side) and three cities in the land of Canaan, which shall be cities of refuge.*" When, then, the land was at peace, and the last of the tribes appointed, the cities were chosen. On the western side of Jordan, the choice fell upon Kedesh in the north, Shechem in the centre, and Hebron in the south. On the other side Jordan, the cities chosen were Bezer in the south, Ramoth Gilead in the centre, and Golan in the north. These cities were at such a moderate distance from each other that no man was farther off from one or other of them than a rapid day's journey. But the majority of the people were much nearer. (Chap. xx., 7, 8.)

After this the LEVITES had their portion assigned to them in the various cities. Nearly every city of refuge became a city of the Levites or Priests;—not, apparently, that they formed the whole population of the cities assigned them, but that they were expected to have their occupation and dwellings distributed over the various parts of the land. It must be remembered, too, that it seems to have been intended that the Priests and Levites should pursue the ordinary avocations of citizens, only going up to minister in the Tabernacle by turn, the course being so arranged that none should be away from home for an inconvenient time. The Priests and Levites were, therefore, not a separate caste or class. They married, brought up children, engaged in trade or agriculture exactly like ordinary citizens. It must also be borne in mind, as has been pointed out before, that these Priests and Levites were not chosen or appointed to their office. Every man descended from Aaron was a priest, whether he would or not.

And every other man of the tribe of Levi was a Levite whether he would or not.*

After the settlement of the Levites in their cities, Joshua dismissed the tribes whose inheritance was east of Jordan to their homes. Like the good leader and father that he was, he commends them much for the good work they have done, and then gives them this solemn charge: "*Take diligent heed to the commandment and the law, which Moses the servant of the Lord charged you, to love the Lord your God, and to walk in all his ways, and to keep his commandments, and to cleave unto him, and to serve him, with all your heart, and with all your soul.*" Then he blessed them, and they went to their tents. (Chap. xxii, 5, 6.)

But he spoke a special word to those of the half tribe of Manasseh, who had their possession across the Jordan, in the rich pastoral country of Bashan. He was himself very closely related to that tribe, being of the tribe of Ephraim, who, with Manasseh, the other son of Joseph, represented that best of Jacob's sons. They were his brethren in a special sense; hence we can understand his giving them a special charge when they went away. His words to them are noticeable as indicating the degree of wealth and civilization with which these tribes would commence their national career. "*Return,*" he says, "*with much riches* unto your tents, and with very much *cattle*, with *silver*, and with *gold*, and with *brass*, and with *iron*, and with very much *raiment*; divide the spoil of your enemies with your brethren. This enumeration of the spoil strengthens the supposition already referred to, that these Canaanitish tribes, notwithstanding their abominable developments of wickedness, had attained a large measure of civilization.†

*The Priesthood of the Mosaic dispensation is sometimes set forth as a model of the priesthood in the Christian Church. But, in truth, they are radically different in nearly every respect.

†It has been the fashion of some men, in these days, to extol civilization as the supreme object of a nation's development, and to contrast it with the results of what they are pleased to call religion. Truth to say, there is much that is called religion in the world that is false, and degrading because false, and there are some kinds of civilization that bear better fruit than false religion.

When these tribes whose territory was across the Jordan returned to their own possession, they lingered on the way, in the plain beyond the river, and erected a great altar, "a great altar to see to," as it is called. (Chap. xxii., 10.)

This simple act was the occasion of a most extraordinary outbreak. The tribes who remained must have heard some distorted and exaggerated account of what had been done; for they evidently concluded that the altar was for the worship of false gods. And like other men have done, they acted without inquiry, and concluded that the worst must be true. They had, indeed, reason enough to fear that their companions might have been tempted into idolatry. Their own experience would teach them that. But they did display on this occasion a zeal that, for them, was extraordinary. They gathered at Shiloh. Some of the more zealous ones were for going to war with their brethren at once; acting first and enquiring afterwards. But better counsels prevailed. The son of the High Priest, that very Phineas whose zeal for God and righteousness was so conspicuous in the land of Moab, took with him ten of the chief men of the tribes, went down to the Jordan valley, and sought an interview with their brethren. Even then they took for granted that a wrong had been done, and, instead of investigating the matter, as wise men would have done, they proceeded to remonstrate, as if certain of guilt. *What trespass, said they, is this that ye have committed against the God of Israel, to turn away this day from following the Lord, in that ye have builded an altar, that ye might rebel this day against the Lord?* Sharp words these, but they spoke sharper still. Phineas, as the chief actor in the judgments that came upon the people of Baal-Peor, reminded them of the terrible plague that came upon

But it is certain that civilization, by itself, is only a veneer; it does not touch the deeper and more permanent elements of character. And all experience shows that the finest and highest developments of civilization are consistent with the most scandalous developments of wickedness. Men and women of the most perfect refinement may be, and often have been adulterers, liars, cheats, slanderers, murderers, traitors; a disgrace to their country and to mankind. It is not civilization, but righteousness, that exalteth a nation. And the mission of this Hebrew people in the world was to exhibit a standard of righteousness.

the host at that time. "*Is the iniquity of Peor too little for us, from which we are not cleansed even yet, although there was a plague in the congregation of the Lord? . . . It will be, seeing that ye rebel against the Lord, that to-morrow he will be wroth with the whole congregation.*" He reminds them how the whole congregation suffered for the trespass of Achan.—"*Did not Achan, the son of Terah, commit a trespass in the accursed thing, and wrath fell on all the congregation of Israel?*" (Chap. xxii., 16, 20.)

A most wise and faithful remonstrance, had it been founded on truth. But it was not founded on truth. His was a case of zeal without knowledge, of blaming without inquiry. And it brought upon them a very dignified rebuke.

The chiefs of the tribes beyond Jordan seem to have been simply stunned by the violence of the accusation. Had it been any other man than Phineas, who had the succession to the High Priesthood, that so spoke, their reply would probably have been a defiant protest, perhaps a revolt, and a separation. But their behaviour was an eminent example of wisdom and moderation. They protested in solemn and dignified terms, that their action was from the very opposite motive to that which had been attached to it. "*THE LORD GOD OF GODS,—THE LORD GOD OF GODS,—He knoweth,—and Israel,—he shall know; if it be in rebellion or transgression against the Lord that we have built us an altar to turn from following the Lord; or if to offer thereon burnt offering or meat offering,—or peace offering thereon; let the Lord require it.*"

To offer burnt offerings and sacrifice in any place but what was Divinely appointed was treason against God. Hence the profound feeling of this protest; the broken utterance, the repetition of the Divine Name, the solemn appeal, the sorrow to find themselves suspected, all reminding us of that striking passage in St. Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, wherein he describes the effect on them of godly repentance. "*What care, what sadness,"* he says, "*it wrought in you,—yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea what indignation,—what fear, what vehement desire, what zeal, what revenge (or vindication.)*" (2 Cor. vii., 11.)

This is the very spirit of the remonstrance of these Israelites

of the olden time. There is in that, all the clearing of themselves, the fear, the vehement desire, the zeal, the vindication so vividly expressed by the apostle many ages afterwards.

They go on to explain the reason of the building of this great altar, viz.: that in days to come, when their children, and children's children, found themselves separated by the Jordan from the rest of the Israelites, they might say, "*What have we to do with the God of Israel? Therefore we said, Let us now prepare to build us an altar, not for burnt offering, nor for sacrifice, but for a witness between us, and generations after us. . . . that our children may not say to our children in time to come,—Ye have no part in the Lord;—therefore, said we, that it shall be, when they should so say to us or to our generations in time to come—that we may say again—Behold the pattern of the altar of the Lord; which our fathers made, not for burnt offerings nor for sacrifices, but as a witness between us and you.*" A dignified protest, indeed, and well worthy of remembrance.

Then, finally after a pause,—during which, doubtless, a solemn silence prevailed,—they concluded; confirming all that had gone before with what was practically a solemn oath, "*God forbid that we should rebel against the Lord, and turn this day from following the Lord to build an altar for burnt offerings and for meat offerings, or for sacrifices, beside the altar of the Lord our God that is before the Tabernacle.*"

This solemn adjuration was sufficient. It was impossible to gainsay it, or to question its sincerity. In the whole history of this people while they were living as tribes in the land of Canaan, they never rose to a greater height of loyal obedience, honor, and love to the God who had redeemed them than on this occasion. For the response was as loyal as the adjuration. Phineas,—the zealous and impulsive Phineas, answered for the congregation, "*This day we perceive that the Lord is among us, because ye have not committed this trespass against the Lord, Now ye have delivered the children of Israel out of the hand of the Lord.*" The last words bear a touch of remembrance of the methods of Divine government, in treating the nation as one, and the transgres-

sion of a part as the transgression of the whole. All the congregation were glad when Phineas and the princes returned with so good a report. And well they might. For to have a division in the very beginning of their national history would have been ruinous. A division in religion would have involved a division in government, as was clearly seen when the ten tribes revolted in the reign of Rehoboam. For at that time, no sooner had the revolt taken place, for a civil and political reason, than it was confirmed by a revolt in religion. Altars of idolatrous worship were set up, and so Jeroboam made Israel to sin. But this only proved that religion was at the very foundation of the life of this unique nation.

The return of the tribes to their inheritance west of Jordan completed the occupation of the land. There were many Canaanites left in it, and in one or two places the authority of the Israelites was not acknowledged, as, for example, at Jerusalem, and in the Philistine country. But, taken as a whole, it might be said that the children of Israel possessed the land.

NOTES TO CHAPTER VII.

THE TYPICAL ASPECT OF THE CITIES OF REFUGE AND THE CONQUEST OF CANAAN.

It is not always wise to press the typical and spiritual aspects of parts of the Old Testament which are not expressly referred to as types in the New.

But the principles on which certain events are referred to therein as types, justify us in regarding some other events as types also. And we cannot be wrong in thinking of those Cities of Refuge as types of the great redemption of the gospel; and the safety of the man who fled thereto, as a type of the safety and peace of him who has fled for refuge to the hope set before him in the gospel.

And the avenger of blood may be considered as a type of the law, which breathes death to the transgressor, but whose condemnation is done away to them who are in Christ Jesus, and are sheltered under His atonement.

Then, the conquest of Canaan is undoubtedly a reasonable type of the conquest of the world by the spiritual forces of the gospel. In the book of the Revelation, Jesus is pictured as the leader of an army, going on conquering and to conquer, he himself being clothed in a vesture dipped in blood, and having on his vesture and his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.

Thus the world is to be conquered, and the powers of heathenism overthrown.

AS TO THE CONSTITUTION OF THE JEWISH STATE.

Nothing is more remarkable in this history than the entire absence of what we moderns would call a constitution, either of the unwritten type of the British Empire, or of the elaborately framed written type of the United States, France, or Switzerland.

There is no provision for the continuance of a chief of the state, for his election or appointment, or for the office being hereditary; no rules for the appointment of judges and magistrates or inferior officers; no establishment of a council. All this leads up to the conclusion that the people were to be educated constantly to look up to their Almighty Deliverer, as a continuous Leader and Sovereign. The Lord,—he was the King, the Law-giver, the Chief Captain, the Supreme Judge. His will was fully revealed in regard to all general principles in the Book of the Law; and with regard to emergencies, and exigencies, from time to time, as to what any particular tribe should do, or what the nation should do, there was established that mysterious method of seeking counsel of the Lord through the breastplate of the High Priest called the Urim and Thummim. And it was evidently also the Divine will that interpreters of that will should arise from time to time in the shape of Prophets.

This being so, it can be understood with what a reluctance, so to speak, the idea of the placing of a king at the head of the nation was entertained in the revelation to Moses. The nation, on its earthly side, was a republic, a commonwealth, a federation of equal states. To choose or appoint any one man as king would give a dangerous prominence to the tribe of which he was a member as well as to himself and family. Besides, to consider the matter from a heavenly point of view, the nation had a king already, and always would have. *The Lord is our Judge*, said the greatest of the Hebrew prophets (Isaiah xxxiii., 22) and this at a time when there was a king on the throne,—*the Lord is our Lawgiver, the Lord is our King!* The state was a Theocracy. It was a kingdom of priests; a holy nation. So, then, it can be understood why there was no provision, now that they were established in the land, for the appointment, or the election, or the succession, of an earthly head of the state. The wise and faithful amongst them looked up to Almighty God to raise up, from time to time, strong and faithful men, able to lead in war and peace, and to Him also to show them, from time to time, by prophets, what they should do. *Shall I go up to Ramoth Gilead to war*, said one of the ablest of the kings of a future time:—*is there not here a prophet of the Lord that we may enquire of him?* (II. Chron. xviii., 6.)

This was the key to the whole national existence of this people. There has never been a state like it since the world began. So long as this great principle of the Divine sovereignty over the nation was recognized in practice, the nation prospered. And it might have continued to prosper, in a national sense, even to the time of the Messiah, had it continued faithful, in any degree, to it. But continued and utter forgetfulness of it, on the part of one generation after another, undermined the national existence, and at last broke it up altogether for many generations.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE LAST DAYS OF JOSHUA.—Joshua xxiii., xxiv.

The return of the tribes to their inheritance beyond Jordan completed the occupation of the land. There were at this time, a number of Canaanites left in it, and, in one or two places, the authority of the Israelites was not acknowledged, as in Jerusalem, and some parts of the Philistine country, which nevertheless was included within the territory of the tribe of Judah. But war had ceased. The Israelites were practically in possession of the country. They occupied most of the cities, towns and villages. They had possession of the cultivated fields, vineyards and olive orchards. It is probable that the cultivators of the soil had always lived in villages, as they commonly do in Palestine and other thickly populated countries of Europe now. But the Israelites had begun their life as a nation, in the land prepared for them, with a written system of jurisprudence and laws, and a Divinely ordained system of religion. Doubtless the administration of law and government was largely as had been established by Moses in the wilderness, under the advice of Jethro; viz., a graded system of responsibility, rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens. These were certainly appointed by Moses under Divine direction at first. And doubtless any subsequent appointment was by Joshua, also under Divine direction.

Neither Moses nor Joshua ever forgot the fundamental principle of the national life of this people, viz., a Divine superintendence and government of a special kind, over and beyond that ordinary providential superintendence which has relation to all nations of mankind. It was as true then as it was in the days of our Saviour, that God causes *the sun to shine on the evil and good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust*. But this people were called out and set apart by special displays of Divine power, and it was specifically revealed to them, that temporal blessing and prosperity for

the whole nation, in peace and war, in the pursuits of industry and in family life, were to be continued so long as the people were faithful to this principle of God ruling over them.

It was, doubtless, a firm conviction of this that led Joshua to refrain from nominating his successor. He had no mandate from above to do it, and he did not; being well assured that their Heavenly King would call out and qualify some leader of men amongst them from time to time, as His representative.

But he did think of the future of this people. His heart was with them in his old age. He was,—and how could he not be,—deeply concerned, and indeed deeply anxious for their prosperity. And he had abundant reason for both. They had been most fickle in their allegiance to their heavenly leader, and only too ready to fall away from their fealty to him.

This, then, was the one subject of his parting counsels; for this involved everything else. Faithfulness to God was simply the one thing, and the only thing, worth thinking about at such a time.

In his old age, *a long time after that the Lord had given rest unto Israel from all their enemies round about, Joshua called for all Israel; who appeared—as was needful, by delegates,—i.e., by their elders, and their heads, and their judges, and their officers.*

Then he made them an address, of much cogency and force, reminding them that *the Lord God had fought for them;—had driven out most of the ancient inhabitants and, would, if they were faithful,—expel the rest from before them.*

Not that they were to fold their hands and be passive. That is not the way of the Divine working, unless in extraordinary emergencies, as we have had much reason to see. They must be *very courageous—keeping firm in the right way, turning neither to the right hand nor the left; and especially making no approaches to the ways of the old inhabitants; not mentioning the names of their gods, nor swearing by them, nor serving them, nor bowing down to them.* How true a foresight was this of the spiritual dangers that beset them! Their whole subsequent history, down to the very breaking up of the state, some eight hundred years afterwards, shows

that there was a danger of a "*perpetual backsliding*," and relapse into idolatry.

"*Cleave, then*,"—he continues, "*cleave unto the Lord your God. . . . Take good heed unto yourselves,—so the Lord will continue to fight for you.*" Then, holding up for a moment the reverse of the picture, he forecasts what would surely come to pass if they foresook this course;—laying special stress on the disastrous consequences of making marriages with the Canaanites that were left, *going in to them and they to you*;—repeating the forcible warning of Moses that these Canaanites would be *pricks in their eyes, and thorns in their sides, snares and traps and scourges to them.*

A true forecast indeed; especially in its warnings against intermarriage. The history of Solomon only too surely verified what is foretold here. But the most disastrous marriage of any Israelitish prince was that of Ahab with the idolatress Jezebel. The miseries that this marriage entailed went on generation after generation.

It appears probable that after this address of encouragement and warning had been delivered, the assembly dispersed. For in the succeeding chapter we have an account of another assembly representing all the tribes, apparently suggesting that only the tribes settled in the land of Canaan proper, took part in the first.

This assembly was held at Shechem, under the shadow of the Mountain of Blessing and Cursing;—the place in all the land of the most solemn associations and memories. There, as before, the heads and chiefs of the nation *presented themselves before the Lord*. Let us bear in mind that though there was only one place of *sacrifice* in the land, it was lawful to *call upon the Lord* in any place. Men might pray then as in ages afterwards, anywhere and as they continue to do now, and find the Lord to be *present*;—present, that is, not in the ordinary sense of being present everywhere else, but in the special sense of being "*nigh to all that call upon him in truth.*"

So, then, this great assembly gathered together for prayer before sitting at the feet of Joshua to hear his parting words.

And certainly these were striking.—They have lost

nothing of their force through three thousand years of transmission.—The history of God's providential leading so forcibly presented in this address, is a type of what many a man, and many a nation, has experienced. And the solemn, and almost startling, appeal to the people to make a final choice between the service of Almighty God, and the gods of heathen nations, is a perfect prefiguration of the great choice which comes, at some time or other, before every man, as to whether he will serve the world, the flesh, and the devil, or whether he will serve GOD. The review of this history is in the Divine name. Joshua had never made an address before in which he spoke as a prophet, saying *THUS SAITH THE LORD*. He had been a soldier and a man of action all his life, and but very little a man of speech. But now his work as a soldier was done. His work, too, as an administrator was largely finished. So, as it was with Jacob, and as it was with Moses, at the very close of life, so now with Joshua; he received a Divine message, and came to speak to the people as the mouthpiece of God. (Chap. xxiv., 1 to 15.)

Thus the review of past events is from the mouth of God himself. "*I took your father Abraham; and led him through the land of Canaan (let us mark the expression *I led him*, for it has not occurred before)—I sent Moses and Aaron; and I plagued Egypt and brought your fathers out.*"

This word from the mouth of God brings out some things which had not been told before, as the manner of Scripture is,—one Scripture throwing light upon another. Thus we learn that Balak the son of Zippor, arose *and warred against Israel*;—no doubt before he sent for Balaam:—and again, that when the host had crossed Jordan and came to Jericho, *the men of Jericho fought against them*, with men of all the tribes of the Canaanites to help them; and again,—that in the war with the two kings of the Amorites (doubtless Sihon king of the Amorites and Og the king of Bashan), *clouds of hornets* were sent to assist the Israelites to drive them. L.*

*None of these are mentioned in the main narrative; but the facts are interesting in themselves, and throw light upon other parts of the story. Such supplementary facts are sometimes, ignorantly, called contradictions, but they are such as are to be found in almost all narratives of past events when the story proceeds from two narrators.

When the review of past events is finished, the address proceeds by Joshua speaking in his own person;—first exhorting to a sincere and honest serving of the Lord, and then proceeding to a bold challenge and protestation.—It is a calling out of men like that of Moses in the evil day of the golden calf,—“*Who is on the Lord's side? let him come to me.*” So Joshua calls upon every man in the assembly to declare himself,—CHOOSE YOU THIS DAY WHOM YOU WILL SERVE,—*If it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord; then choose which of the gods you will serve, whether the gods of your fathers beyond the flood, (i.e., the gods of the Assyrians and Chaldeans) or the gods of the Amorites in whose land ye dwell.*

This bold and decisive manner of stating the case was enough to settle the matter;—for, however men might, through temptation or bad example,—fall into idolatry, it required an extraordinary hardihood in wickedness to deliberately avow a choice for it, at such a time and in such a place.

It hardly needed the avowal of Joshua, that, at any rate, come what might, his choice was made; “*AS FOR ME AND MY HOUSE, WE WILL SERVE THE LORD*”;—to ensure a hearty and solemn response from the assembly. Joshua knew the effect of unfurling a standard, as do all men who have conducted military operations. The flying of a flag, has many a time, in these days, produced an electrical effect upon a multitude, deciding the wavering, strengthening the timid, firing the bold with a more daring courage.—Joshua, therefore, now unfolded his flag, and it was the flag of allegiance to Jehovah. There has been one incident like it in modern times, and that, too, was the proclamation of an unflinching allegiance to a lawful sovereignty. When Nelson unfolded his signal at Trafalgar, the whole fleet felt the thrill of excitement caused by the appeal to England, as watching, and looking on, and expecting “*every man to do his duty.*”

So when Joshua put it upon every man to make his choice that day, either to follow him in loyal allegiance, or to be a traitor to his God and country; the heart of the assembly was stirred, and they cried out with one voice, “*God forbid that we should forsake the Lord, to serve other gods: . . . for the Lord our God : He it is that brought us out of Egypt ;*

which did great signs in our sight, and drave out from before us the Amorites which dwell in the land:—We also will serve the Lord: for he is our God." A loyal and hearty avowal, as was meet.

Yet, that it might be confirmed, as a matter of serious and deliberate choice,—their own choice, acting for themselves, and not merely as influenced by their leader's example, Joshua causes them to reflect by the use of a very singular form of speech: . . . *He said unto the people, Ye cannot serve the Lord; for he is an holy God; he is a jealous God, he will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins,—If ye forsake the Lord and serve strange gods, then he will turn and do you hurt, and consume you after that he hath done you good!*

But to appreciate the true idea of these words one must consider the time and circumstances, and also the character of the people. They had proved themselves to be a most fickle, and,—at times, a most cowardly and thoughtless race. It was easy enough to protest, as they did then, under great excitement, that they would serve the Lord, as thousands of people have done in our own day, and as those did whom our Lord pictured under the simile of the seed growing where there was no depth of earth. To such, a wise teacher will now, as Joshua did then, point out that a religious life is no path of roses, God's law no easy law to obey, and God's wrath upon the man who turns his back, a matter not to be trifled with. It was perfectly true then, as it is true now,—that men cannot serve the Lord,—that is—in their own strength, (which was plainly what was meant by Joshua in his address)—and that God would not forgive their transgressions,—that is, if they refused to approach him through the sacrifices that he had ordained;—which the following of other gods involved. It was also perfectly true that if, after beginning in the right way they turned their backs upon it, they would be sorely punished for it.

The force of these strong words of Joshua was this,—think seriously, weigh carefully what you are doing, and all that it involves;—be prepared for self-denial and sacrifice,—for the worship of false gods is easy and agreeable; remember that your action now will affect not yourselves alone, but your

children, and children's children; and the whole future of the nation.—

In this spirit of solemnity Joshua spoke, and in the same spirit they evidently heard; for they answered,—*NAY*;—by this word renouncing false gods and wicked ways, even as one making a Christian profession in these times renounces the devil and all his works:—and going on to make a positive and solemn promise,—our service shall be given to *THE LORD*!

Then their great leader called on them solemnly to *witness against one another*, that they had made their choice, to which with one voice they assented—*WE ARE WITNESSES*:—*Put away*, then, said he, your strange gods;—words which indicate that even while carrying on war with the Canaanitish people, the gods of the land had fascinated them. The people then, for the third time, made the solemn asseveration of allegiance to Jehovah in the words, *THE LORD OUR GOD WILL WE SERVE, AND HIS VOICE WILL WE OBEY*!

The Covenant made that day was then *written* by Joshua *in the book of the law of God*:—probably the very same that had been written by Moses himself, and deposited in the ark of God: and then, as the manner of the time was, a great stone was set up under an oak, Joshua saying, "*Behold this stone shall be a witness unto us*;" adding, with a very bold figure of speech,—*it hath heard all the words of the Lord which he spake unto us; it shall therefore be a witness unto us lest ye deny your God!*—(Chap. xxiv., 27.)

These were the last words spoken by this faithful servant and soldier of God; and well had it been if they had been remembered as they should have been, to all generations. For this was what was intended to be shadowed forth in symbol by the erection of a stone; a Stone, a rock, indeed; the most durable of all natural substances, the very synonym of solidity and unchangeableness. Faithful, indeed, and without a single blot on his faithfulness and courage, had Joshua been during his whole life, and now, in extreme old age, for he was an hundred and ten years old—his last words and acts were, so far as he was capable of doing it, to stamp his own character of faithfulness upon that whole generation. And, indeed, they had that effect in a large degree. For it

is recorded that *Israel served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that overlived Joshua*;—the influence of this one great and good man not only pervading and preventing the community during his life time, but after his death, as is, indeed, the order of things in the world;—God ruling over all.

Joshua was amongst the last of the men whose years went beyond a hundred, their natural force being but little abated. The gradual decrease in the age of man had been operating for generations, but it seems to have been by a special exercise of Divine power that the lives of such men as Moses and Joshua were preserved beyond the natural limit. And there was reason for it in the vast importance of the work that was given them to do: as there was, and always continued to be, a reason in the nature and circumstances of things, for any of these other displays of Divine power which are recorded in the Scriptures of God.

At a hundred and ten years of age, then, Joshua died; and was buried in the territory of his own tribe of Ephraim. But there is no mention of any funeral, or general mourning; though it is hard to conceive that for such a man, the mourning would not be that of the whole nation. The silences of Scripture, however, are amongst the many remarkable features that distinguish it from all human records.

The last record in this book of Joshua is a very touching one. When his great progenitor, JOSEPH (for Joshua was one of his descendants), was dying in Egypt, he gave a strict injunction to his brethren to carry up his bones with them when they went up out of Egypt. This dying command is referred to in the Epistle to the Hebrews (chap. xi.), as one of the triumphs of that faith which is the substance of things hoped for. "*I die,*" said Joseph, "*and God will surely visit you and bring you out of this land, into the land which he swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. And Joseph took an oath of the children of Israel saying, God will surely visit you and ye shall carry up my bones from hence!*"

That oath was remembered when the time of deliverance

came, nearly two hundred years afterward, and when Moses led the people out (Exodus xiii., 19), as they went up, in ranks, they took the bones of Joseph with them. And when the land was settled, so that there could be certainty of no disturbance hereafter, these were buried in the very piece of ground which had been bought by Jacob ages before in Shechem. There he had spread his tent, and erected there an altar, which he called EL-ELOHE ISRAEL—that is, God the God of Israel.

So the history of this remarkable man, Jacob, and his remarkable descendants moves on from age to age, always under a Divine guarding and overruling, one event being connected with another, the one thing that made this history differ from all others being that it was the history of a people of a Divine Covenant, that through them, all nations of earth should be blessed. Which promise was fulfilled when Jesus Christ came, *of the seed of Abraham according to the flesh, but declared to be the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead.* (Romans i., 4.)

THE BOOK

OF

JUDGES.

CHAPTER I.

PRELIMINARY.

One of the most remarkable of the many remarkable things in the early history of these Jewish people, is the fact that no provision was made for a ruler, or head of the State, of any description, to succeed Joshua. Moses had nominated Joshua under Divine direction to succeed him, in the headship of these people. But the work of Joshua was almost wholly military, and he had no successor at all. But well was his work done. Towards the close of his life, the great conventions had taken place at which he had addressed the people, through their representatives; not however upon any matter of civil polity, or of military defence, but solely as a prophet or a priest might have spoken. The burden of his address was exactly that of Barnabas to the Christians of Antioch, who, being sent to visit them by the Church at Jerusalem, "*exhorted them all that with purpose of heart, they would cleave unto the Lord !*" This was Joshua's exhortation fifteen hundred years before, and almost in the same words.

But of any direction for the government of the country, either civil or military, he said not a word. And this is the more noticeable from the fact that most careful provision had been made for the perpetuation of the priesthood; and that in the most certain and efficient way. The High Priesthood was hereditary in the family of Aaron; so, without election, or nomination, or appointment, which might fail, but by the simple law of natural descent the high office was continued. Thus, every male member of the tribe of Levi was either in the first or second order of the priesthood. So it was impossible for the priestly office to lapse; and throughout all the changes that passed over the fortunes of the civil state of this people, there must always have been priests to offer sacrifice, until the Great High Priest came who was the substance of the shadows of the Old Dispensation. Soon

after He had ascended to heaven, the priesthood became extinct by the destruction of the Temple; and it has never been revived.

But of provision for a continued head of the civil state there was none.

Yet, it may be asked, was there need for any? Does not this careful provision for the continuance of the priesthood, and the entire absence of provision for a chief magistrate, fully conform to the theory that this people was a *kingdom of priests and a holy nation*; separate from the kingdoms of this world, altogether unlike them in constitution; a *peculiar treasure* to the Lord of all the earth; called out to be witnesses for the One Living and True Jehovah during ages of estrangement and idolatry.

It would surely seem so. And conformably to this was the strenuous exhortation of Joshua to cleave to the Lord; as if this one thing embraced everything. And, so, indeed, it did. THE LORD had created them as a nation, given them a body of civil law, ordained, through Moses, a system of graded government by heads of tribes and families, and, above all, had given them victory over the ancient inhabitants, and covenanted to give them victory still, if faithful, should war break out again.

The political condition of the nation was that of a number of self governing tribes of one race, each having a large amount of separate interest and individual character and history. It is evident then that they would fall into the condition of the Canaanitish tribes, had they not had some common bond of unity. Both in ancient and modern times this was customarily furnished by some controlling central authority; like that of Babylon or Rome in the many tributary states making up these empires. We see the same principle in the Federal Government of the United States at present, and also in the British Government of the many tribes and principalities of India.

Now, in the entire absence of any common bond of unity of this sort, what was there to unite them, but a common belief in JEHOVAH, a common system of religion, a common body of civil laws, and a common centre of worship? And, now, we can see the Divine wisdom and foresight which

made it a part of their religion that every man in the land must repair to the centre of worship three times a year, wherever that centre might be; and remain there a week, offering sacrifices and gifts through the priests. There friend would meet with friend, a common sentiment of nationality would be developed, tribal littleness and jealousy would be diminished, and all would feel that they were one people, descendants of a common father, worshippers of the same one Almighty God, who had saved them from slavery, given them their land, and made them a nation.

For many hundred years after the death of Joshua this was the great bond of union. But, inasmuch as emergencies arose, from time to time, sometimes from the attacks of neighbouring tribes or nations, sometimes from divisions amongst themselves, "*the Lord raised up Judges, who delivered them from the hand of those that spoiled them. And the Lord was with the Judge,* (Chapter ii., 16, 18) and gave victory through him, and he continued to rule the State after military operations were over. But it is to be noted that there was no continuity whatever in the office.

When the Judge died, no successor was nominated, none appointed. The people continued their course of civil and religious life, some cultivating the land, some trading in the towns, with their organization for government appertaining to each tribe, of elders, heads, and officers, as in the time of Joshua. Sometimes a tribe would go to war on its own account, or, as deputed by the rest, making an alliance with another tribe, as Judah did once with Simeon, when so Divinely directed. And, tribes would sometimes war against each other.

But, whenever a serious emergency arose, threatening the whole people, a man (or sometimes a woman, as in the case of *Deborah*) was raised up to lead the whole people. Thus it was that the men were called out, whose exploits and history are recorded in this book of Judges.

This condition of things lasted for many hundreds of years, and during their progress many remarkable men and women arose. It was, however, a time of alternate settlement and unsettlement; of many events that were strange, striking,

and even startling; of relapses into barbarism and idolatry, and national wickedness; and of recoveries therefrom, and the attainment of a high degree of piety, patriotism, and of heroism. It is in this book we have the record of GIDEON, and DEBORAH, and BARAK, and SAMSON, and JEPHTHA; and of deeds of daring and faith that have never been surpassed in the whole Jewish annals. Yet the key to the whole history, as it assumes one phase after another in the strange phantasmagora of events, is this:—were the people, or were they not, faithful to the God of their fathers? Their fortunes and their reverses, their victories and their defeats, their glory or their disgrace, all may be traced as one or other of these principles prevailed.

But, indeed, it was not only in this period of the administration of Judges, but after the establishment of a monarchy, that the operation of the same rule can be traced, down even to the time when the State was broken up and the mass of the people carried away captives to Babylon. Yet it must always be remembered that even when the King erred most grievously, many of the people at times were faithful, and that even in times of national apostacy, as after the establishment of idolatry in the kingdom of Israel, there was always a remnant of faithful ones like the *seven thousand* in the dark days of Jezebel, *who had not bowed the knee to Baal!*

Yet it must be confessed that a country governed like this land of Canaan was, would be exceedingly difficult to conceive of in these modern times. We have had, indeed, and have still, examples of a tract of country being divided into small states or principalities, each with a government independent of the rest; as were the Saxon Kingdoms in the Heptarchy, or the Principalities and Kingdoms of Germany or Italy in modern times, or the states of the Federal Union of North America. But wherever there has been a union in government of several quasi-independent states, there has always been some visible symbol of it, in a central governing body and a supreme head of the whole. The states constituting the United States could not act as a single sovereignty before the world if they had not a President.

And, of necessity, there would arise a body of counsellors about him, and, in a democratic condition of things, a legislative body having jurisdiction over every part of the land. Without these the United States would not be one of the great powers of the world, but a congeries of small powers; every one absolutely independent of the rest. This, indeed, was the ideal of some of the founders of the United States; and the expression "sovereign state," often used formerly, but since the war much more seldom, was the expression of this idea. And the conflict between this idea of sovereignty as appertaining to each state, and the opposite one of sovereignty (in any true sense of the word) as appertaining to the whole of them united, went on for several generations, and, finally, brought on the Civil War.

Still, no one, not even the most intensely democratic theorist, ever dreamed of a constitution in which there was no general uniting bond at all. Such a state of things could not have existed for a single year, and any attempt to bring it about would have resulted in the formation of a series of independent governments, each having its representatives with foreign powers, and with such diverse interests that North America would have been a constant scene of dissension and warfare.

But this only brings out unto strong belief the contrast between this newly constituted Jewish state and any other government, state or kingdom that ever existed upon earth.

For this was a Kingdom of Priests, a "holy nation," of whom the Lord who had called them out of Egypt was the Protector and Supreme Governor. And this separated kingdom, called out that they might be a perpetual depository of Divine truth, and a witness amongst the nations of the world to the Unity of the Godhead, was a lively type of the Christian Church, which is also a separated people, a people called out of darkness into God's marvellous light, whose office and work it is to *offer spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ*. But the Christian Church, unlike the Jewish Kingdom, has expressly committed to it the great task of subduing the whole world to the obedience of the faith, not by carnal but by spiritual weapons; even

by teaching and preaching, and by the power of the Holy Ghost.

Now that this people was established in this promised land, which was now their own, what was their position with regard to other countries and their governments? A very practical consideration, on a knowledge of which will much depend a right understanding of many events of their subsequent history.

Their position was this. They were situated immediately between the kingdom of Egypt, to the south, and the kingdoms occupying Syria and Assyria, to the north. The first, as we have seen, was at that time a highly developed, and civilized country, where art, science, and literature flourished, and where temples, palaces, and monuments existed which were of such vastness and solidity as to have survived the ravages of time during four thousand years.

Egypt, their nearest neighbor, once held them in slavery, and was powerful enough, humanly speaking, to subdue them and carry them off to slavery again, should any ambitious Pharaoh ever conceive of such a project. But such an invasion did not take place for hundreds of years, and there never was even an attempt to carry the people back into captivity to Egypt.

Between the land of Canaan and Egypt stretched the old desert of their wanderings, occupied by warlike tribes of Amalekites, rovers of the desert, true sons of Ishmael, *their hand against every man, and every man's hand against them*; always ready when opportunity offered to make a raid into the rich cultivated country, much as the Highland chiefs of former days did into the lowland plains. To the east of the river Jordan, all along the shores of the Salt Sea, and stretching out to the great Arabian desert country, were the Moabite and Ammonite nations, which had been severely handled as the Israelites passed through their country, but who still remained as organized governments, and so continued for hundreds of years after the time now being spoken of. And though weak at the time of the death of Joshua, the Kingdom of Moab had become so strong in the course of one or two generations, as to be able, being allied with the Am-

monites, and Amalekites, to wage a successful war against Israel, and reduce them to servitude for a time. So these three, the people of Moab, the people of Ammon, and the people of Amalek, occupied all the adjacent territory to the east and south. And troublesome neighbours they proved.

Then, down on the Mediterranean coast, were the warlike tribes of the Philistines, hereditary enemies of the Israelites, though so near. Of what they were, and what they did for many generations, the Scripture chronicle of the time is full. It is sufficient, in connection with the Philistines, to recall the names of Samson, Samuel, Saul, and David, for a record of victory and defeat, of honor and disgrace.

Then, to the immediate north was the great region of Syria, stretching on to Mesopotamia, and Chaldea, and Babylon; not, then, as it was afterwards, under the dominion of one great monarch, as Sennacherib of Nineveh, or Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, but divided into several kingdoms and principalities, with Damascus, Nineveh, and Babylon as their centres. Many ages were to elapse before Nineveh and Babylon consolidated their power and subjugated Israel; and in the time of the Judges, we never hear of them. But we do hear of a king of Mesopotamia who was a scourge to the Israelites for their idolatry, very early in their history.

So, then, this remarkable people were occupants of a very small territory, only about one hundred and fifty miles from north to south, and sixty to eighty from east to west, beautiful, fertile, a land of valleys and hills and mountain ranges; flowing with milk and honey. But such tracts of territory, like other good things of this world, are generally objects of envy to neighbours; and of warlike neighbours they had abundance, as has been shown. But they were safe, on one condition; that they should observe the tenure by which they held the land. That tenure was allegiance to their Almighty Deliverer, the God of the whole earth.

But there were other sources of trouble besides the neighbours that surrounded them. In spite of all that had been done in Joshua's time, there were numbers of the Canaanites left in the land. These were reduced to a condition resembling serfdom, in that they were dispossessed of ownership in the land. It is probable that they clung to the towns and

cities;—and assisted in carrying on trade and commerce. But they were most devoted to idolatry. And one of the noticeable things about this history, is that we never read of any of these Canaanitish people being converted to faith in the one true God. Nor do we find any of the people of the surrounding nations so converted. It is true that the Jews of that time had no mission to convert. But, it might well be thought, that the truth, evidently set forth by this Jewish people, in their worship and daily life of teaching and prayer, and the practice of the virtues inculcated by the law, would be sufficiently attractive to draw many within its influence. But it did not. *Magna est veritas, et prevalabit*, was not an aphorism applicable to those times. And, indeed, it is a question whether it applies much to any time. Virtue does not attract; but vice does. Truth repels men; error and falsehood find innumerable votaries.

It was then, as it is now, that only Divine influence turns the heart of man to truth in belief, and righteousness in conduct. *Men*, naturally,—and apart from the grace of God, *love darkness rather than light*; and that,—because their deeds are evil.

For the very religion of these ancient peoples was evil. Their deities were principally BAAL and ASHTEROH. Of Baal there were various developments; but all of them were developments of impurity. The Canaanite conception of Baal corresponded closely to the Greek conception of Jupiter in after times; a powerful, unscrupulous, unjust, and licentious divinity, who required no righteous conduct in his votaries, gave forth no law of goodness, and whom any man might serve, no matter how wicked he was, without a thought of reformation. Baal was male; Ashteroth was female; and corresponded to the Greek Venus. The very ceremonies of worship of these deities were developments of depravity.

MOLOCH was a god of blood and cruelty; having no exact correspondence with any god of Greece;—but was like some of the Hindoo divinities of modern times.

There has always been a singular connection between licentiousness and cruelty. And this god, Moloch, was the expression of that phase of human nature which finds pleasure in

inflicting torture. Our own Indian tribes of former days,—the Iroquois and Hurons, as well as the Pawnees, the Blackfeet, and other tribes of the present, are true devotees of Moloch, not in name, but in spirit. The god of the Ammonites, *CHEMOSH*, was also closely allied to Moloch.

These various idolatries were universal amongst the Canaanites and surrounding tribes; and all were bad, debasing, and corrupting.

Thus, then, the lot of the Israelites in the land was not an enviable one. Politically, they were a number of separated tribes, without a common bond of cohesion, surrounded by states and tribes, some of which were far more powerful than themselves,—religiously, they had the duty of maintaining a system of truth, duty and worship which was altogether repugnant to human nature, and to the ideas and practices of the nations round about.

Apart from special Divine protection, they could not possibly have continued to subsist as a nation. But that protection was promised by solemn covenant. It never failed. It saved the nation again and again when in extremity. And it preserved them till the times of the coming of the Messiah.

And for Divine purposes, it is preserving them as a scattered remnant still.

CHAPTER II.

OTHNIEL, EHUD.

(Judges iii.)

The first of the succession of good and valiant men that were specially raised up to deliver the land when in trouble, was a nephew of Caleb, Othniel by name. A worthy successor was this, in courage and faith; and one marvels that he was not nominated for the office of leader by Joshua before his death. But sufficient reason for this failure to nominate has been shown already. The Divine nomination came when it was wanted, as it continued to do through all this period of the Judges.

The beginning of the trouble that befel the people was the very thing they had so often been warned against, viz., intermarriages with the Canaanitish people who were left in the land. These marriages with the heathen then, had the same effect that marriages with the ungodly have, as a rule, now, viz., not a raising up, but a dragging down. The heathen wife made a heathen of her husband, and caused him to wander after false gods. And this became so common that it was said of the people generally, that *they forgot the Lord their God, and served Baalim and the groves.*

Baalim is the plural of Baal. It has been shown that there were various manifestations of this primary idea of Baal; the word, in the root, signifying a lord or ruler. There was Baal-Peor,—lord of the openings, or passes in the mountains, Baal-zebub, or lord of flies, Baal-zephon, lord of the north. These were all forms of the one worship of a licentious tyrant;—and, together, constituted the service of Baalim,—or divers Baals.

But the word groves, here and in some other places, is a mistranslation of a word which differs only very slightly from that used in the previous chapter (v. 13), where it is stated that the people *forsook the Lord, and served Baal and*

Ashtaroath,—the latter being, as has been stated, the counterpart of the goddess Venus. But the word, in some places, does apparently mean a grove of trees surrounding a temple,—which groves were strictly forbidden by the law revealed through Moses, and, as experience proved, for good reasons.

The declensions into idolatry, then, were the same, in principle, as those which happen in these days. A godly and pious man marries a godless and worldly-minded wife. Rarely is the record anything but a deterioration of character in the husband; a lowering of the tone of piety in the home, the discontinuance of family prayer, and often a slackening of attendance on the house of God. And the children of such marriage are in an evil case, for the influence of the mother,—falling in with the natural bent of every human heart in alienation from God, will almost certainly result, apart from God's special mercy, in the children growing up in ungodliness. This is often seen, also, to be the case where the wife is a Romanist and the husband a Protestant.

We must, however, distinguish.

Experience in modern society shows that when a worldly man marries a godly woman, the reverse effect frequently takes place. The influence of the godly woman prevails. A careless and irreligious husband is drawn to regular attendance upon the house of God;—family prayer is established in the home; the godly wife saves the husband, the children are brought up as the children of Christian people should be.

Again and again has it been found, that even when a husband has fallen into evil habits,—the devotion and piety of the wife, patiently continued with persevering prayer, and exercise, under God, of loving tact and wisdom, have been the husband's reclamation and salvation. Still, it is an experiment not to be tried lightly, for the Christian rule is that a woman may marry whom she will, but "*only in the Lord.*"

But where the evil influence is with the wife, the rule is that the husband and family are drawn down to her level. This, of course, with exceptions.

Now, to apply this to the case of these Canaanitish marriages, it is probable, in a high degree, that it was the Hebrew man who made an alliance with the Canaanitish woman; and not that a man of the Canaanites would ever induce a

Hebrew woman to marry him. The last is an extremely improbable case, while the former agrees with all that is known of history and of human nature. This being so, and it being certain that the laws of life and influence have not changed, it can be seen how that the marriage of Israelites with idolatrous women would result in the forsaking of the worship of Jehovah, and the spread of the seducing idolatries of Baal and Ashteroth.

The inevitable consequence followed.

It was one of the conditions of their preservation as a nation that they should be faithful to Jehovah, and in that solemn ceremony of blessing and cursing from Mounts Gerizim and Ebal, they were reminded that unfaithfulness would certainly be followed by national disaster.

So, then, it came,

The first war in which they were engaged since they occupied the land, broke out. The king of Mesopotamia cast covetous eyes on their goodly inheritance. Beyond the brief record of the Scripture little or nothing is known of him. He is called Chusan-Rishathaim, and his kingdom is called Aram-Napharaim. The word Aram is that used by the prophet Balaam (Numbers xxiii., 7), as the place from whence he had been sent for by Balak; and he describes it, as "out of the mountains of the East,"—(Padan-Aram is the ancient country of the maternal ancestors of Jacob. Gen. xxviii., 2.) This Chusan-Rishathaim territory, no doubt, bordered close upon the eastern or north-eastern part of the territory of the Israelites, and the ostensible reason or pretext for his invasion was doubtless some dispute as to what was the exact boundary. Such disputes have been a fruitful cause of dissensions between nations, as the history of the Continent of Europe witnesses. And we Canadian people know to our cost, how apt such disputes are to arise.

Thus does history repeat itself.

But there was a deeper reason than appeared on the surface of things. This ambitious and aggressive king, while pursuing his own ends, and gratifying his own greed, was unconsciously working out the ends of the Supreme. Even as the chief priests and scribes, when persecuting our Saviour, and putting him to death, were working out, "*the determinate*

counsel and foreknowledge of God," (Acts ii., 23) and bringing about the redemption of the world, so was this Chusan-rishathaim, while thinking only of his own plans, an instrument in the Divine hand, for chastising the faithless people of Israel. As it came about, many ages afterwards, in the time of Isaiah the prophet, when *Assyria was the Rod of the Divine anger*, to punish a rebellious people, so, now, The two events are an exact counterpart; another case of history repeating itself closely, for the chastisement came from Assyria in both, and for the same cause.

The Lord then "*moved out of His place,*" and gave victory to the Syrian king; and *sold* the people of Israel to him for eight years;—the first of the many times when a like cause produced a like result;—faithlessness bringing defeat and captivity.

But, after eight years of bondage, the heart of the people "*turned again to the Lord.*" Once before He had delivered them from bondage,—as some of them were almost old enough to remember. And now the people cried to Him for deliverance. We read of no national convention, no gathering of heads and elders at Shechem or elsewhere. They could not gather thus, while held down under a foreign yoke. And, doubtless, they were prevented from gathering at their annual festivals. But in their families and village communities, and in quiet, and perhaps secret assemblies in the cities, even as did Christians in after times of persecution, the people must have talked and prayed.

And when the children of Israel cried unto the Lord, the Lord raised up a Deliverer. (v. 9.) As He had raised up the man who had chastened them; so, now, when the time appointed had come, He raised up the man who saved them. And watching the movement of the Divine hand in government and providence, as we have watched it before through the ages of Creation, we notice, with interest, the Divine choice of an instrument.

The man for the time and occasion is always found; and in the Divine order, it is the man with qualification for the work that is called out.

The first of these Judges, OTHNIEL, then, was that nephew of Caleb, who had won his daughter by the daring exploit of

taking the Canaanitish stronghold of Debir. He was the man raised up to deliver Israel and drive away this Eastern oppressor. And it is very noticeable how it is stated that the *Spirit of the Lord* came upon him for the purpose. The same phrase is used of Gideon and of others, and it suggests much thought. Is this a revelation of that Holy Spirit of the Christian dispensation, the third Person of the mysterious Trinity;—the Spirit of power and of wisdom, symbolized by fire to denote His Divine Energy, the mighty spiritual force which filled the early Christian teachers and leaders, and fitted them for the work of converting the world to the obedience of the faith?—And is this the same Spirit of God, described in Creation as *brooding over the face of the waters* (Gen. i., 2), and bringing order out of chaos? In these and many other passages there seems to be a shadowing forth in embryo of that deep mystery of the Godhead; the threefold Personality; which cannot be adequately comprehended by the reason, but which strikingly corresponds to the manifold needs of human souls.

But, be this as it may, it is certain that this man, Othniel, a brave and daring soldier, became, in God's own appointed time, filled with a Divine impulse of resistance to tyranny; that he organized an army, went out to war and fought against Chusan. Then, as the way of these chronicles is, looking at the Divine side of things, we learn that the *Lord delivered* this king of Aram into Othniel's hand. But what became of him we are not told. No particulars of the conflict are given, how many were engaged, or how many slain. But that it was an effectual and final victory is evidenced by the fact that it was succeeded by a *forty years' peace*.

Not a word is said of what transpired during this forty years, though, naturally, one would much desire to know more of this Othniel, the first of the Judges. But this is one of the silences so characteristic of Scripture. We may, however, reasonably infer that it was a time of unbroken peace and prosperity, for the record is that *the land had rest*, every man minding his own farm and his own vineyard, and the people generally being faithful to Jehovah, attending to feasts and sacrifices, and putting away altogether the abominations

of the Canaanites. All this continued as long as Othniel lived; and that it did continue during his whole life time is a silent, but striking, tribute to his strong personality, and to his faithfulness to the Covenant made in the last days of Joshua; also his widely extended influence over the people.

But, after forty years, Othniel, the son of Kenaz, died.

Then, as it was after the death of the great Protector in England, came an outbreak of licentiousness and wickedness; one of those revulsions which have been only too common in history. *The children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the Lord.* (v. 12.)

And again the Divine chastisement came.

More than a hundred years had elapsed since the children of Israel had passed through the territories of Moab and Ammon on the east of the Dead Sea. It had been a time of peace with them, as well as with the wandering tribes of Amalek. They had gathered strength and wealth and population during this long period. And now these three powers made an alliance, under an ambitious and warlike king of Moab, Eglon; pursuing their own ends, yet, all the time, unconsciously being God's ministers of wrath to His people. Under the lead of Eglon, the united forces crossed the Jordan in a time of low water, at the fords opposite Jericho—(where the spies crossed), and made a sudden attack in force upon this city of palm trees. Israel was smitten, the city was taken, and—although it is not so stated,—it is evident that these invaders overran and subdued the whole land. This disaster was a Divine chastisement, and it lasted eighteen years. (It is evident that Jericho, to some extent, had been rebuilt by this time.)

What transpired during this time we know not; but all analogy would point to its being a time of oppression, when the substance of the people was taken from them by the tyrants that ruled over them, and when no man's life or property was safe. We have a vivid picture of the condition of a country thus conquered in the song of Deborah over a later deliverance:—"In the days of Shamgar," she sang, "*the highways were unoccupied, and the travellers walked through*

by-ways; the villages ceased, they ceased in Israel;" evidently depopulated because of the raids of their oppressors; a condition, in fact, not much unlike what has prevailed in many parts of the Turkish Empire in modern times.

In chapter VI. there is described exactly what the condition of the country was under the oppression of Midian; "*The children of Israel made them the dens which are in the mountains, and caves and strongholds. And so it was, that when Israel had sown, that the Midianites came up, and the Amalekites, and the children of the East. And they destroyed the increase of the earth . . . and left no sustenance for Israel, neither sheep, nor ox, nor ass.*"

Under such oppression as this, the people groaned for eighteen years.

Then, as before, they cried for Divine help.

And help came: but in a way that seems, and is, undoubtedly, strange. But experience shows that the God of judgment sometimes uses very strange instruments. As in the days of Ahab and Jezebel, judgment came by that fiery-souled Jehu, anything but a man of God's own heart, so now, deliverance came by a rough and daring soldier, perfectly unscrupulous as to means, so that the end was accomplished.

EHUD, a Benjamite, a tribe which produced many strong and daring souls, took the lead in a conspiracy of revolt.

The matter was managed with much secrecy. No one about the court of the oppressor suspected what was going on.

But it was determined that Eglon, the king of Moab,—doubtless a cruel, and ruthless tyrant himself, should be assassinated. And Ehud undertook to do it, carrying his life in his hand.

He did assassinate the king. Under pretence of a secret conference with him, he was able to see him alone. And he escaped. He then raised the standard of revolt in Mount Ephraim, blowing a trumpet, and gathering the people about him; giving the word of command: "*Follow after me; for the Lord hath delivered your enemies, the Moabites, into your hand.*" The onslaught of Israel prevailed, the soldiers of Moab, fled to the fords to cross over the Jordan to their own country. But they were caught,—a terrible slaughter ensued—and not a man escaped. (v. 15, 30.)

Thus ended the oppression, and thus came deliverance to Israel.

After this, the land had peace for four score years.

Now, with regard to this assassination; we are not called upon to defend or to excuse it, for the narrative does neither. It is a true narrative; true to human nature and to the time. The thing was done, as it is described to have been done. And it was natural. On the supposition that this Eglon had been a tyrant and an oppressor, probably shedding much innocent blood,—as was almost certainly the case, there would be numbers of people who would feel bitterly towards him, and concede that any means were lawful that would rid the land of such an oppressor. Certainly they would so feel. Whether the feeling was right or wrong, would depend on circumstances.

This assassination, let us bear in mind, differed entirely from some other famous deeds of the same kind. It was not like the killing of Sennacherib by his sons, for that was prompted by ambition, nor of Cæsar by Brutus and the Conspirators, for Cæsar was not an oppressor, nor of the Prince of Orange, for that was from religious fanaticism,—nor of President Lincoln, for that was from revenge.

The Divine law is clear, *thou shalt do no murder*. That is the rule of conduct for every man. By that rule every man who kills another shall be judged. But killing in war is not murder. The putting a criminal to death is not murder.

And whether an action like this is to be considered as an act of war,—or an act of public justice, can hardly be told without more complete knowledge.

But it certainly was not murder in the ordinary sense, for there was no private malice, which is an essential feature of the crime. It was, in fact, the first act of a war against the oppressors of a country by the oppressed.

CHAPTER III.

DEBORAH.—BARAK.

(Judges iv.)

After the brief episode of the deliverance by SHAMGAR, of whom nothing is said but that *he slew six hundred men of the Philistines with an ox-goad*—an action very difficult to understand, and suggesting some mistake of a transcriber as to numbers; we come upon a series of very striking events.

A long period of peace has brought prosperity and wealth; wealth has brought luxury and love of the world, ungodliness, unbelief, and a falling away from the truth into idolatry. It is always so. Sensuous and idolatrous religions, or sensuous and idolatrous corruptions of the true, always find congenial soil in the hearts of men and women who have become enervated and spoiled by wealth and worldworship. It is so in these our own days. It was so with Israel during the times of these JUDGES.

And, so now, once again, to restore and heal this backsliding people, the Divine hand is put forth in chastisement. The same striking phrase is used for it that has been used before. *The Lord sold them!* He had once bought them; bought them, according to the bold figure of the prophet Isaiah, by giving up Egypt for them, (Isaiah xliii., 3) Egypt, which He might have chosen, and which, to all human appearance, was incomparably superior. But Egypt was rejected, and the people of Israel were redeemed by striking down its power. But now, He who had once redeemed them, raises up a powerful enemy for their chastisement, whose oppression and tyranny are more bitter than any they had known. Their adversary is a king of Canaan. Though this northern part of the land had been conquered by Joshua, it is evident it had regained an independent

existence. During the long reign of peace, one of their kings had been able to consolidate and develop considerable military power, having at the head of his army a famous captain, Sisera; who had devoted himself to perfecting a branch of military power that the Israelites were absolutely forbidden to lean upon. *Nine hundred chariots of iron* had he under him;—of iron, indicating a high degree of manufacturing skill and mineral development at that early day. But was it an early day? Was it not rather a late day in the world's history? Had not Egypt been known for ages as a highly civilized state, where all the arts flourished? and was not Egypt in close proximity? Then, again, to the north, and very near, was there not that famous city of Damascus, a city already boasting of hundreds of years of civilization?

So, then, we need not be surprised at this formidable force of cavalry, but only do well to remember that there was practically only one place in the land where it could be used to effect. In the hill country of Judea, in the central region about Shechem, and in most of the mountainous country, it would be difficult to use a large force of chariots with effect at all. At the present day, a wheeled vehicle is rarely seen over the greater part of Palestine, with the single exception of the railway to Jerusalem, and on some of roads in its neighborhood.*

*The visit of the Emperor of Germany to Palestine in recent years has had some remarkable results in the way of improvements of the roads about Jerusalem. The author travelled in the spring of 1901 in a carriage over the highway leading down from Jerusalem to Jericho, a descent of 3,500 feet; and found it to be wide and well-macadamized, kept in good order, and admirably planned for safely traversing the wild gorges and precipitous mountain sides of the region. The carriages of a large party passed as easily over it, as they would have done over a turnpike in the neighborhood of London or New York. Only a few years ago, the road was a narrow, rough track, passable enough for horses and small vehicles, but impracticable for such carriages as are now to be seen about the hotels in Jerusalem and its suburbs. The improvement is entirely due to the visit of the German Emperor. The road to Bethlehem, and also to the summit of the Mount of Olives is now equally good with that to Jericho.

One very singular consequence of the Emperor's visit was that a considerable portion of the wall, near the Jaffa gate, was broken

But there is a great plain in the region lying between Shechem and the Sea of Galilee; now called the PLAIN OF ESDRAELDON, stretching nearly all the way from the Mediterranean to the Jordan. Here the nine hundred chariots could be used. In this wide expanse they could turn and wheel and fight. And this plain became the scene of the stirring events of this chapter.

This Canaanitish king, acting through Sisera, the captain of his army, was a tyrant of the worst kind. He *mightily oppressed* the children of Israel. His tyranny lasted twenty years, and in that time the Israelitish country was given up to lawlessness and brigandage. None durst use the highways, for fear of robbers, who plundered with impunity:—*Travelers walked*,—(for none dared to ride)—*through by-ways* and mountain paths. Villages and towns were forsaken. And, in the song of Deborah, we hear how the use of arms had entirely ceased. *Was there a shield or a spear seen*, cried the prophetess, in her bold and picturesque ode, *among forty thousand in Israel?* (Chap. v., 8.)

It looked as if the power of Israel was broken, and that the regime of the Canaanitish nations had returned.

Although Jabin was king it seems certain that the real power of the State was wielded by the captain-general of the army; and that the measures of oppression and tyranny were mainly his. For, when many years afterwards, the prophet and ruler Samuel was reviewing the history of this period (I. Sam. xii., 9) he said, "*And when they forgot the Lord their God, he sold them into the hand of Sisera!*"

Sisera, then, was the soul of the oppression, as Alva, in modern times, was the soul of the oppression in the Netherlands, though not the king.

But at the end of twenty years, the cry of the Israelitish people was heard, and deliverance sent in a remarkable manner. For some time, there had been kept up some semblance of authority amongst the scattered Israelites, but

down in order to allow the Kaiser to enter the city in state and with éclat, which he could not possibly have done had he been obliged to pass through the narrow portals of the Jaffa gate. This opening is now the principal avenue of entrance to the city within the walls.

the authority was in the hands of a woman, Deborah by name, —a married woman, who had become known as a prophetess. "*She judged Israel at that time.*" Her husband was living; a fact which probably was the reason why she was allowed by Sisera to exercise any semblance of rule at all. He could have crushed anything which implied the exercise of real authority. But he might very well, as he would suppose, afford to despise or tolerate this playing at authority by a female and a prophetess. Therefore she was permitted to sit quietly under her palm-tree in Mount Ephraim, and render judgment to those who came for judgment. (Chap. iv., 5.) As to any idea of special Divine power being with her, Sisera would have ridiculed it.

But this is not the only time in history when a tyrant and oppressor has misjudged the thoughts and the power of the oppressed.

Oppression and persecution have lasted, even in modern times, very long. But they generally lead to serious thought, to consultation, to determination, to the formulating of plans, to secret gathering of arms, and finally to an outbreak. All this, doubtless, was taking place during the last few years of the oppression; as is evident by the message sent to Barak by Deborah, when the time for action had come. "*Go and draw towards Mount Tabor,*" she said, (Mount Tabor rises out of the Plain of Esdraeldon), *and take with thee ten thousand men of the children of Naphthali, and of the children of Zebulon.*

This is clear evidence of long and secret preparation, for such a number could not possibly be gathered with readiness to act together unless there had been concert beforehand. The song of Deborah gives a vivid idea of the preparation which had been going on amongst the tribes. EPHRAIM, BENJAMIN, ZEBULON, are all mentioned as helping the good work, the last *with the pen of a ready writer*; —doubtless preparing lists and rolls, and writing necessary letters and despatches to summon the forces to the conflict.

The Princes of ISSACHAR were forward too; but, alas! the tribe of REUBEN, more secure than the rest, being on the other side of Jordan, was divided in counsel, and *abode among the sheepfolds*, while their brethren were fighting.

No wonder that for this there were *great searchings of*

heart. (Chap. v., 15.) Gilead, too, under which name was comprised the half tribe of MANASSEH, abode beyond Jordan and refused to move; and DAN, a tribe bordering on the Mediterranean, *abode in their ships*, an incidental glimpse into the occupation of some of the people on the sea coast, for Joppa, which existed thus early, was in the tribe of DAN. ASHER, too, whose territory touched the sea near Mount Carmel, and then stretched away northward, refused to move.

The brunt of the battle was borne by Zebulon and Napthali; and they are embalmed for ever in this famous song as a people that *jeopardied their lives in the high places of the field!* (v. 18.) But strange to say, Judah, the chief of the tribes, is not mentioned at all, the reason probably being that it was far from the scene of conflict. One place, however, is mentioned in a manner that has branded the name with everlasting disgrace. Meroz,—a town in Issachar, lying very near the scene of conflict, is mentioned with a bitterness that would imply either absolute treachery, or a shameful breach of a covenant engagement: "*Curse ye Meroz,*" said the Angel of the Lord: "*curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof; because they came not up to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty!*" (v. 23.)

As the *Princes* of Issachar are mentioned as taking part with Deborah, this hanging back of one of the towns of the tribe is only accountable on the supposition that a considerable part of the population were descendants of the old inhabitants, whose lives had been spared in the time of the Conquest..

But all this demonstrates that there had been much consultation, much making of solemn engagements, much preparation;—all in accordance with the Divine plan of calling out all human powers and faculties; and giving them strength and stimulus when any great work had to be done. The people "*cried unto the Lord,*"—under the grinding tyranny of Sisera;—prayer went up continually; and the answer came, not in the way of miraculous help, but first in giving them heart and courage, and wisdom of combination; and then in raising up a woman of enthusiasm and force of character like DEBORAH, and a skilful soldier like BARAK. The whole narrative reminds us somewhat of England at the time of the

Spanish Armada, and of the gallant Queen Elizabeth, with the famous admirals, Howard, Drake, and Hawkins, who commanded under her.

The first move in the conflict came from Deborah. A Divine impulse which she well recognized as God's command, stirred her soul; and, moved by this, she sent the summons in the name of the God of Israel, to Barak, to gather his forces together at Mount Tabor.—A most politic movement was this;—for while the great area of the plain would entice Sisera to bring there his whole force of chariots, he could not use them against a host occupying the sides of the mountain; while the banks of the river Kishon, that flowed through the plain, would be full of danger to a host of cavalry;—even when the river was in its ordinary condition, much more when it was swollen by rains to a roaring torrent.

There was a Divine foresight, doubtless, as to the time of this movement. For it is evident from Deborah's song, that the swollen condition of the river had much to do with the rout of Sisera's army. And he who knows the whole course of nature, knew of the coming storm.

Barak refused to move unless Deborah accompanied him. This determination was founded on a true instinct. Deborah was known and revered as a prophetess. The people all believed, the soldiers of the army included, that the God of Israel spake by, and to this woman. Her presence, they felt, would ensure victory. God would fight for them if she were there.

The remarkable power of a single personality in the operations of an army has already been referred to. The presence of Napoleon with his troops inspired them to dare and do the most astonishing things. This presence was estimated by the Duke of Wellington as equal to more than twenty thousand additional men. "*How many do you count Me ?*" said the great Frederick of Prussia, when his captains were once dubious in the presence of a much superior force. Even so.

Faith is a mighty force, whether it is faith in God, or faith in a prophet. And Barak was wise in saying: "*If thou wilt go with me, then I will go; but if thou wilt not go with me, then I will not go.*" But Deborah was not the woman to shrink. She would go. Yet she had a presenti-

ment,—a Divine monition, in fact, that Sisera would be slain, not by Barak, but by a woman. (v. 9.) How much was revealed to her cannot be gathered from the narrative. Whether she knew who the woman was to be, or whether she supposed that she herself might be the woman, cannot be told. But that by a woman Sisera would be slain she did know.

Sisera put his army in motion on hearing of this uprising, spreading it out in the wide plain at the foot of Mount Tabor. And, strange to say, he received the information of Barak's whereabouts from one of the descendants of Moses's wife's father. (v. 12.) The refusal of Hobab, the brother-in-law of Moses, to accompany the people through the wilderness was a trouble to the great leader. But that Hobab concluded afterwards to go with them is evident, for the first chapter in this book relates that Heber, a son or grandson of Hobab, had separated himself from his own people, and cast in his lot with the children of Israel, dwelling for a time in the tribe of Judah, and then pitching his tent in the country north of the Sea of Galilee, and very near the territory of Jabin, the king of Canaan. (Chap. iv., 17.)

It may seem strange to find this man helping Sisera by giving him information, but we know how even in modern warfare, strong measures are at times taken to compel the inhabitants of a district to assist the commander of a hostile force.

The armies met at the foot of Mount Tabor, Sisera with his chariots occupying the plain; Barak disposing his force on the lower slope of the mountain.

The signal for attack was given by Deborah in a few stirring and enthusiastic words, spoken in the confidence of faith in God. The word was as stirring as one of Napoleon's proclamations, but without his bombast. And it recalls a celebrated order, said to have been given in the crisis of battle at Waterloo, by Wellington, and also a stirring exclamation of Cromwell at the battle of Dunbar. "*Up*"—she cried to Barak, "*for this is the day in which the Lord hath delivered Sisera into thy hand: Is not the Lord gone out before thee?*" (v. 17.)

Such words from a woman, acknowledged to be a prophet-~~ess~~, would run like wildfire through the army, and inspire the

most timid with courage. Barak then made the attack, leading the army down from Mount Tabor, and his host of ten thousand men after him. The onset was sudden, swift and decisive. The moment was doubtless well chosen, for Barak could see every movement of Sisera's army, which was down on the plain; while his own could be easily concealed on the wooded slopes of the mountain. It was an attack like Wellington's at Salamanca, when he saw with a soldier's eye that the French General was weakening his centre by extending his wings; then taking advantage of the right moment "he put forty thousand men *hors de combat* in forty minutes."

Like this did Barak, a Divine prescience guiding him; whence it is said, not that Barak and the army gained a victory, but that "*the Lord discomfited Sisera; and all his chariots, and all his host, with the edge of the sword before Barak.*"

Barak the instrument, Jehovah the inspiring force; the glory being to Him to whom all glory is due. For, though men of a godless stamp deride the idea of Providence, and say with Napoleon, that it is always on the side of the heaviest battalions, the very history of Napoleon himself demonstrates that THERE IS A GOD THAT JUDGETH IN THE EARTH!

So terrible was the discomfiture that Sisera was compelled to dismount from his chariot and fly for safety on foot. The highly poetical song of Deborah speaks of the very elements warring against him. "*The stars in their courses fought against Sisera,*" (v. 20), the stars being looked upon as potent factors in the region of the clouds and storms. For evidently a tremendous thunder and rain storm burst over the land towards the close of the battle. *The river of Kishon swept them away, that ancient river, the river Kishon!*—overflowing its banks and carrying off chariots and horsemen, even as the chariots of Pharaoh were swept away by the returning waters of the Red Sea.

For then were the horse hoofs broken by the trampling and plunging of the strong ones. (Chap. v., 22, margin.) A passage giving a vivid idea of the dreadful confusion into which the chariots were plunged as they were swept away by the swollen waters,—or entangled in the morasses that border the river.

Thus all the host of Sisera fell upon the edge of the sword. There was not a man left. A mighty victory indeed.

Then an action took place which has been the occasion of endless comment and criticism ever since, viz., the killing of Sisera by the wife of Heber, the Kenite.

Sisera, flying on foot, and separated from his attendants, came to the tent of that very man who had informed him of the whereabouts of Barak. There he evidently considered himself safe.

Jael, the wife of Heber, is spoken of as the mistress of the tent; it was to *the tent of Jael* that he fled. She invited him in; assured him of safety, gave him refreshment, found him a place of rest, covered him with a mantle, (or as the margin reads, with a rug, or blanket) and then, when he was fast asleep,—*went softly to him*, and drove a nail of the tent into his temples, with such force that it *was fastened to the ground. So he died!*

A most treacherous and barbarous action, apparently, on the face of it; violating the laws of hospitality, as it did, and making use of them for the purpose of destroying one who had fled to the tent for refuge. A deed to be reprobated, one would think, and the perpetrator of it one who should be brought to justice as guilty of murder.

Yet this deed is extolled as heroic by the prophetess Deborah; and Jael herself *praised above women*, as one who had delivered the land from an oppressor.

What course of thought can we imagine as leading to such a conclusion as this on the part of a godly and devout woman, —a good and honorable woman, such as Deborah undoubtedly was?

Let us endeavor to realize the circumstances:—

1st. There was evidently on Jael's part an entire absence of that private malice which is of the essence of the crime of murder.

2nd. Jael undoubtedly considered she was performing a dangerous public duty in ridding the land of a merciless tyrant. He had *mightily* oppressed Israel. What she did was most dangerous, for had she failed, she would undoubtedly have been killed herself.

3rd. Though Heber was not of the Hebrew race, it is

almost absolutely certain that his wife was. Her name is Hebrew. She could not but have felt bitterly the oppression and tyranny, the poverty, privation and misery, that the people of her race had been subjected to by this formidable man. The bitterness of the oppression would fall most heavily upon the women, many of whom had probably been carried away to the tents of Sisera and his captains. (See Chap. v., 30.)

4th. Burning indignation and deep purpose of retribution could not fail to fill the mind of all Hebrew women as these things were pondered by them, year by year.

5th. These things being assumed, and they are undoubtedly most probable, the conclusion must follow that Jael conceived that her action in compassing his death was in the line of Divine judgment upon the oppressor and the enemy.

6th. There remains only to be considered the deceit she practised in promising shelter and protection. Here one may well pause. That her action was one of the highest advantage to these oppressed people is certain. Such a man as Sisera, a man of great military capacity, and iron will, a *mighty* oppressor, would make every effort to recover himself after this disaster, as other Generals in modern times have done, as Napoleon himself did after the Russian disaster, and after the overthrow of Leipsic. In that case there would come another time of war and bloodshed, of desolated homes, of rapine and murder and oppression, involving thousands of Hebrew women in untold misery. On the other hand the killing of this man would put an end to war, bring peace to homes, ensure safety to women, and restore prosperity to the land. Can it be wondered at then, that this woman was carried away by a spirit of patriotism and love for her race and kindred; and that as this terrible enemy approached she quickly formed the purpose of destroying him. Then, as the only possible way in which she, a woman, could accomplish this, was by luring him into the tent that he might sleep; she hesitated not to practice deceit, as generals practise stratagem in war,—in order to fulfil the great purpose of judgment that possessed her.

This is a reasonable way of accounting for her conduct, and

that it is the right way must be evident from the fact that what she did was commended by the prophets of God.

It is easy to criticise, and natural for unbelievers and enemies of Divine truth to find fault, but in this, as in other like passages of the Sacred Word, a careful consideration of the circumstances, the time, the antecedents and what followed, is absolutely necessary to arrive at a fair understanding of the character of the transaction.

CHAPTER IV.

GIDEON.

(Judges iv.)

This series of remarkable men raised up one after another to deliver Israel,—are all referred to in the Epistle to the Hebrews as men of eminent *faith* in God: men, *who through faith, subdued kingdoms; wrought righteousness; obtained promises; stopped the mouth of lions.* (Hebrews xi., 33).

And this was the real touchstone of character in those days even as now. Do men believe in God as a real, present, living, prayer-hearing Supreme Being? or do they believe in Baal and Ashtoreth; i.e., in the power, and wealth, and pleasure of this world?

In the days of the Judges, Baal and Ashtoreth were real forces of spiritual evil, having their temples, priests, sacrifices, and votaries. All this has passed away into the silence of forgotten ages. There are no Temples of Baal and Ashtoreth anywhere now in the world. But the subtle and powerful principles of evil embodied in these idolatries are living forces still. Mammon is worshipped; power is worshipped; pleasure is worshipped.

Men in numbers, who outwardly conform to the Christian faith, in their hearts are devotees of wealth and power; and for the sake of these they will cross the seas, endure hardship, sacrifice health, and not seldom violate the laws of man too. The "*auri sacra fames*" of the ancients,—that "cursed thirst for gold," is a more powerful force in some spheres of modern life than ever it was in the ancient world. And to how many women is not fashion a goddess? and how many, both of men and women waste health, and wear out life as devotees of pleasure; real worshippers and willing servants of the imperious Ashtoreth of modern days?

Nothing but faith in God could break the chains of this

spiritual slavery in the times under review. And it is striking to see how this mighty opposing principle prevailed, and enabled men to do wonderful deeds for God and country.

The story of GIDEON opens with the same monotonous iteration of the falling away into idolatry on the part of the people after a long period of peace and prosperity. Even as it is now, that ease and wealth benumb the spiritual faculty, and predispose to the worship of the gods of this world, even so then. "*The children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord.*"

The instruments of chastisement at this time were the wandering Midianitish tribes of the desert. Not by Canaanites, who still clung with tenacity to portions of their old territory, nor by Philistines who had never been dispossessed of their strongholds near the Great Sea, nor by organized nations like Moab and Ammon; the plague under which they suffered for seven years came by the incursions of the tribes of the Eastern desert, who were the exact counterpart of the Bedaween Arabs of these times. The name *Midian* and *Midianites*, as used in these Scripture records, is a very broad and general one, and had been used for generations, as it was in Jacob's time for the descendants of Ishmael, of various tribes, who had spread themselves over the vast regions of Arabia, and *whose hand was against every man*, then, as indeed, it practically is now. They did not come and remain in Canaan; that would have been altogether contrary to their mode of life. But when the crops of this rich land were ripe, they swarmed over the border in great multitudes to plunder and carry away. The Scripture narrative gives a vivid idea of their mischievous raids:

"*Because of the Midianites the children of Israel made them the dens which are in the mountains, and caves, and strongholds. And so it was that when Israel had sown, that the Midianites came up and the Amalekites, and the children of the East, (all varieties of the same people) and they encamped against them, and destroyed the increase of the earth, till thou came to Gaza; (that is, they swept across the whole country from East to West), and left no susten-*

ance for Israel, neither sheep, nor ox, nor ass. For they came up with their cattle, and their tents, and as grasshoppers for multitude, for both they and their camels were without number, and they entered the land to destroy it ! (Chapter vi., 4, 5, 6).

A wretched condition of things, indeed, and very difficult to contend against; the host of the enemy being so diffused; moving so swiftly, having fleet horses and dromedaries to carry them from one part of the country to another, so that a settled agricultural population would have no chance against such swarms of armed robbers. It was, indeed, very much what our Anglo-Saxon fathers suffered from the Danes. Thus they were tormented for seven years. Then the prayer of distress became general, and God, the God of Israel, answered. But the answer was not what they expected. When a man in distress appeals for assistance, and is told that his distress is his own fault; it is a hard answer indeed. But this was God's answer, sent by a prophet; (Chapter vi., 8.) and coming from a prophet, and in a day of distress, it must surely have led to searchings of heart. Doubtless it did; for it was followed up as before, by the calling out of a man.

In the tribe of Manasseh, on the West of Jordan, and near the great plain of Esdraeldon, which would certainly be the headquarters of the marauding host year by year, was a little village called Ophrah. There dwelt a cultivator, named Joash, who must have suffered severely from the marauders, being in the very track they would take when spreading themselves over the land southward. His son GIDEON had become famous as a man of strength and courage. (v. 12.) Probably he had resisted some of these raiders, driven them off, or slain them after a conflict.

To him, as he was threshing wheat, by the winepress, to hide it from the Midianites, came an Angel of the Lord, revealed himself, and saluted him, "*The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valor !*" It is not an invocation, the Lord be with thee; but an actual declaration, the Lord is with thee ! And so Gideon understood it; and understood also that the personage who had addressed him was no mortal man. "*Oh ! my Lord !*" was his response; but in

that response the modest spirit of the man shone out. For he did not take the declaration to himself; but to the whole people, and instantly bethought him of the Divine Presence accompanying the people through the wilderness; drawing a vivid contrast between that time of wonders, and this—when such sad disasters had befallen them.

Then the angelic messenger speaks in His true character. It is THE LORD who speaks; that wonderful manifestation of the Divine personality who in after ages became the *Emmanuel*, even *God with us*.

The call of the Lord is clear and unequivocal; as clear as it was to Moses himself: "*Go*," says the Divine voice,—"*go—in this thy might; and thou shalt save Israel from the Midianites: Have not I sent thee!*" (v. 14).

But Gideon, true man that he was, was humbled to the dust by this message. As Moses cried: "*Who am I that I should go and bring the people out of Egypt?*" as Jeremiah, the prophet, when the message came to him to speak mighty words to the nations, cried out: "*I cannot speak, I am a child!*"—so this man of valor shrank into himself and pleaded utter inability, and also utter unworthiness. Let some leading man be chosen,—not me: some prince or noble, or elder. But my family is poor in our tribe, and I am the least in my father's house! (v. 15).

This is the true man; the man who appreciates his work and its responsibilities, and so appreciating, shrinks from undertaking it. Gideon speaks as did the Apostle Paul in after ages. "*Who is sufficient for these things?*" and again, *unto me who am less than the least of all Saints, is this grace given to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ!* (Ephes. iii., 8.) But experience shows that these are the men that succeed.

Then came the great promise, "*SURELY I WILL BE WITH THEE; AND THOU SHALT SMITE THE MIDIANITES AS ONE MAN!*" If God be for us, who can be against us? A man with faith enough to take hold of that promise, could undertake almost anything. But Gideon was not sure; a cautious man, and not an enthusiast, he asked for a sign, and a sign was given. Signs, let us remember are not always given. All depends on the motive of the enquirer. When the captious and

fault-finding Jews asked a sign from Jesus he answered that *no sign should be given them save the sign of the prophet Jonas!* The truth was, that he was giving them signs, day by day, in abundance, but they refused to see.

Gideon, however, was a man of willing heart; willing to believe and ready to do. To such men signs are given.

God revealed himself to him more and more plainly. It was then as ever since, *to him that hath shall more be given.* Then Gideon did a thing which showed plainly how far the people had departed from obedience to the Divine law of Moses. *He built an altar unto the Lord;* a simple and natural action, one might say. Yet it was in plain contravention of the law that no sacrifice should be offered save in the place where God should set his name, (Deut. xii., 13) and then only by His own priests. It suggests, indeed, as much else in the chronicle of these times suggests, that the tabernacle of God, and His worship had fallen into entire decay during the long years of oppression under which the people had groaned at various times. For during the whole narrative of this book of Judges, there is scarcely a word to indicate that there was a tabernacle, an altar, an ark, or a priest in the land. None of the Judges named therein was a priest, and we hear nothing of the order until we come to the touching narrative of Samuel and Eli.

Thus then, in the early days of Gideon, there had been no regular tabernacle worship, and his action in rearing an altar to Jehovah was natural and highly approved. The altar he called *Jehovah-Shalom: the Lord send peace;* a name expressing both faith in God, and strong desire for deliverance from the ravages of marauding hosts.

That same night he was called on for action.

The condition of the people, religiously, is plainly indicated by the fact that the worship of Baal was the established order in his own village. His own father was a devotee of Baal; so were his household; so were the men of the city. The first step toward the deliverance longed for was to break up all this. And Gideon was called on to begin the work, first by throwing down the altar of Baal that his father had set up, then by cutting down the grove around it, and building an altar to the Lord on the top of the rock,

(the same rock, doubtless, on which the altar had been erected to Baal,) and offering a burnt sacrifice thereon, with the wood of the very grove that had been cut down.

A very strange command was this last. Any man could throw an idolatrous altar down; but for one who was not a priest to build an altar to the Lord and offer sacrifice thereon was to do that for which the people in the time of Joshua were ready to go to war with the tribe of Reuben. (Joshua xxii., 16).

But, plainly, the worship of Jehovah had died out in the land. The tabernacle was taken down, the ark removed, the altars hidden away, the priests attending to secular affairs; there were no sacrifices, no festivals, no offerings, no passover celebration. The land had relapsed into heathenism.

It was under these circumstances that the Supreme Ruler set aside for the moment, the provisions of the ceremonial law; setting aside the letter that it might be observed in spirit; and called out this man Gideon who was not a priest at all, not only to build an altar, but to offer sacrifices of burnt offering upon it.

The throwing down of Baal's altar was done by Gideon in the night. Then, when morning came, and the people looked up to the high place, and saw the grove cut down, and the altar of Baal overthrown, there was an outcry, "*Who hath done this thing ?*"

Who, indeed, had been bold enough to defy Baal, the god of power; and thereby put his very life in danger from the anger of offended divinity? Gideon's life, truly was not in danger from Baal. But Baal's friends and partisans were many; and they insisted on Gideon being put to death. Then it was that the spirit of reason triumphed over the spirit of idolatry. The gross absurdity of a god like Baal not being able to help himself, struck the father of Gideon with irresistible force, and, idolator though he had been, he renounced Baal that day, and stood up in strong remonstrance with the people.

"*Will ye plead for Baal ?*" he cried, "*will ye save him ?*
... If he be a god, let him plead for himself !" (v. 31).
 From which vigorous and convincing reproof came the

surname that was given to his son: JERUB-BAAI, which means *Let Baal plead*; for, as his father Joash said, *let Baal plead for himself, because he hath thrown down his altar*. Language, this, strikingly like that of Elijah many generations afterwards; when he poured out bitter sarcasm on the priests of Baal at the great trial on Mount Carmel.

While all this was going on, the host of Midianites and the other marauders had crossed the Jordan on their annual raid, and were ranged about their old camping ground in the valley of Jezreel, or plain of Esdraeldon, as it is now called. Then came the *Spirit of the Lord upon Gideon*; and he blew a trumpet!—a call to arms. A signal for revolt against the oppressor. We learn from the New Testament that the Spirit of the Lord has many manifestations; and that such manifestations are given to every man to profit withal. (1 Cor., xii., 7).

In the apostolic age, the great need was the power of speech, and the power to work miracles, and both were given abundantly, according to time and circumstance.

Another gift of that age was Faith. The special need of every time is answered by the Spirit's manifestation. Now it is prophecy, now it is faith, now it is courage and daring, now military skill. Thus was the manifestation of the spirit of Gideon; it came upon him *to profit*; inspiring him with courage to undertake the perilous enterprise of driving this formidable host out of the country, and with faith in God to give him success.

The men of his own district of Abi-ezer gathered round him when he blew the trumpet. Then he took the lead of the little company, sent to the neighbouring tribes of Manasseh, Asher, Zebulum, and Naphtali, who came readily at his call. The two last had not forgotten the fame they had earned as leaders in the fight against Sisera; while Asher this time made up for its former inactivity, and joined heartily with the rest.

Thus Gideon found himself at the head of an army of more than thirty thousand men. But, now, a wave of doubt seems to have swept over his spirit; and he again desired a sign. How national characteristics survive. In the

Apostle Paul's time he wrote of his countrymen "*the Jews desire a sign*" (1 Cor., i., 22.) Twelve hundred years before this, the same characteristic note appears in Gideon. And the Lord did not reprove him. For Gideon undoubtedly was a good man, and only dubious about his own ability in the face of such a dangerous and difficult enterprise, and the immense armed host he would have to deal with. He, therefore, asked a confirmation of the Divine promise that Israel should be saved by his hand. And it came unmistakably; in a double form. For first a fleece of wool on the floor was filled with dew whilst all the ground was dry, and next the dew appeared upon all the ground whilst the fleece remained dry.

Then Gideon was satisfied. And now, filled with faith and courage, he girded up his energies to the work of deliverance.

CHAPTER V.

THE ROUT OF THE MIDIANITE HOST.

(Judges vii., and viii.)

In reading of the battles, and victories or defeats of these early times in Judea, we are liable to be misled by comparing them with the operations of the armies of modern times. In point of numbers alone, the statements seem incredible, and impossible. And so they would be if the composition of the armies we read of in Judea was in any sense similar to that of a modern army. For this is a body, in the first place, selected from amongst the most able-bodied of the population; then thoroughly equipped with weapons and warlike appliances—organized scientifically into troops, regiments and divisions, and subjected to a course of drill and discipline before being called out into the field. But the armies of the Israelites and their enemies were evidently, in many cases, composed of the whole male adult population, very imperfectly equipped with arms, for the most part with scarcely anything that could be called organization, and without any long preparatory drill. Such an army, under the inspiration of a valiant leader, might achieve wonderful success over another army similarly composed. On the other hand, with timid and faint-hearted leading, it would be liable to terrible panics and reverses; the whole disorganized multitude fleeing in terror from a pursuing foe. Such armies, not having the strength and cohesion which perfect organization gives, would be almost wholly dependent on the character, spirit, and strength of the individual leader or individual soldiers. And hence arose the paramount importance of *faith in God* on the part of the leader; this faith giving unbounded courage and coolness in danger, and inspiring the soldiers with resolute daring, even in presence of a much superior host. Faith in Almighty God was a mighty force in war, as it has been proved to be in many enterprises

of peace, and the vivid description in the Epistle to the Hebrews, how the men of faith "*Subdued kingdoms and wrought righteousness*," is no mere piece of rhetorical declamation, but a sober statement of a natural sequence of events according to the invariable laws of human conduct.

Now, then, let us think of this great host of the Midianites, not as a modern army would be, as organized in troops, regiments, and battalions, under captains of lesser and higher grade, with one general over all, but as a vast host of men spread over the wide plain, with multitudes of tents and camels; armed, certainly, just as the Bedouins of to-day are armed, but without cohesion or power of acting together in masses, so as to make their great numbers effective.

Yet, they had watches set by night, and there were some chiefs or princes;—heads of tribes, amongst them; and, doubtless, there were numbers of women, if not children, amongst them, just as there were in the great armies of Xerxes and Darius.

Now, what would be the best mode of attacking a host like this? Let us follow the narrative, and we shall see a wonderful display of Divine wisdom, and the adaptation of means to a destined end, working through human instrumentality; yet, without any direct exercise of miraculous power. For this narrative, though very striking, is evidently free from anything like a miracle.

Yet, God guided the whole operations of the attacking force, as He guides those who trust Him, even in these days, leading them by His Word, and Providence, in a way which is always the right way, though often mysterious and hard to understand.

Even so were the first steps of the Divine leading in this conflict. These steps were processes of sifting. Gideon had his host of over thirty thousand men about him,—and was doubtless looking from the heights bounding the great plain of Jezreel on the south, to the Midianite encampment spread out toward the north, much in the way that Napoleon looked out on Wellington from La Belle Alliance to Mont St. Jean.

But here Gideon received a very strange message. Doubt-

less he was pondering whether his army was numerous enough when the Divine voice spake to him, saying that they were *too many*. (v. 2.) And the reason given was that Israel, if victorious, might vaunt themselves against their God. And nothing more likely.

Then the command was given, *Whosoever is fearful and afraid, let him return home*. Then there returned of the people *twenty and two thousand; and there remained ten thousand*. (v. 3.) The sifting was a most severe one, two-thirds of the whole army returning home! Yet the sifting was salutary, for the faint-hearted men who went away would have spoiled the whole enterprise.

This, however, was not enough.

There are yet too many,—said the Lord: *Bring them to the water, and I will try them there; and it shall be that of whom I say unto thee,—This shall go with thee, the same shall go with thee, and of whomsoever I say unto thee,—This shall not go with thee, the same shall not go*. (v. 4.)

Then occurred the second testing, which was remarkable enough. And one can imagine Gideon's thoughts as the remaining ten thousand were to be reduced to a lower and lower number. Brought to the brook flowing down through the lower ground beneath them, the men were ordered to drink. Some, naturally enough, dipped their hands into the water and lapped with their tongue; others bent down upon their knees to drink. The whole scene is what would transpire if the same thing had to be done to-day,—and there does not seem much special indication of character in the different methods of the two sets of men, unless it be that the men who put their hands to their mouth were more temperate and abstemious than the others. Be this as it may, there were only three hundred of them. Yet, to Gideon's astonishment, the Divine word came to him that by *these three hundred men*, the men that put their hand to their mouth, the Lord would save Israel and destroy the Midianites. A trial of faith, indeed, a *fiery trial*, like that spoken of by the Apostle Peter,—and resulting, like that, in faith being strengthened to the *honor, and praise, and glory of God*. (I. Peter i., 7.)

Thus, by this second test, nine thousand seven hundred of

Gideon's followers were released, and the whole burden of the enterprise put upon a mere handful of men. Yet, these, with God on their side, were sufficient. In after years, this great truth was keenly apprehended by Jonathan, when fighting the Philistines. (I. Samuel, xiv., 6), and also by King Asa (II Chron. xiv., 11), when contending, at the head of a much inferior force against the Ethiopians. "*It is nothing with God to help, whether with many, or them that have no power!*" Yet in both these cases the Divine power was manifested through human instrumentality, and by the operation of ordinary forces. And so it was in this case of Gideon.

For it is evident that the mode of attack was the best that military skill could have devised, and it was so made, as not only to secure victory, but to spare the lives of thousands of industrious Israelites, who returned to their farms and their vineyards in peace, and saving the population and wealth of several tribes from depletion.

It was, doubtless, while waiting upon God in expectation, that Gideon received word, *in the night, Arise, get thee down unto the host, for I have delivered it into thy hand.* (v. 9.)

Now, a night attack by a modern regular army, or a portion of a regular army, upon another army in the field, is an enterprise so dangerous that it is rarely attempted. But if a military genius like Napoleon or Wellington had devised a plan of attack upon such a host as this of the Midianites, he could not have advised a plan more exactly suitable to the circumstances, and more likely to succeed.

Gideon, however, true to his character of extreme caution, again required his faith strengthened by a sign. And a sign was given him;—as signs had been given him before, because he was a true and faithful man. Signs never fail such as these.

If thou art fearful, said the Divine voice, take thy servant and go down to the host. Hear what they say, and thou shalt be strengthened. He obeyed, went down into the valley in the silence of the night; when *the Midianites and the Amalekites, and all the children of the East, lay along the valley like grasshoppers for multitude, and their camels without number, as the sands of the seaside for multi-*

tude. (v. 12.) As he saw, dimly through the darkness the signs of this immense host, his heart would surely sink within him, and his thought would be,—What can three hundred men do? This would be the voice of human nature; of human reason:—But the conception of the enterprise was not of human nature or human reason, although worked out by human instrumentality. It was the enterprise of the God of Israel, in response to the cry of his oppressed people, working by this valiant and faithful man Gideon. So a sign was given him now, to strengthen him.

The two men, Gideon and his servant, creeping cautiously by the edge of the host, heard a man telling a dream to his fellow: "*Behold,*" he said, "*I dreamed a dream, and lo, a cake of barley bread tumbled into the host of Midian, and came unto a tent, and smote it that it fell, and overturned it that the tent lay along!*" A significant dream, indeed. For a cake of barley bread would be as likely to overturn a tent, as Gideon's three hundred to overthrow the host of Midian. But the answer of the other was far more remarkable, for it shows that the Midianites were aware of Gideon's preparations, that they knew the man, having probably—(as was said before)—felt the prowess of his arm; and that some of them knew that the God of Israel intervened at times to deliver. "*This is nothing else,*" said he,—this barley cake overturning the tent,—"*save the sword of Gideon, the son of Joash, a man of Israel; for into his hand hath God delivered Midian, and all the host!*"

This is one of those sayings in which a man, without knowing it, utters the mind and purpose of Almighty God;—even as the High Priest, in Council, speaking of Jesus, declared (John xi., 50), that it was *expedient* "*that one man should die for the people,*" little dreaming of the profound spiritual truth he was uttering. Even so this man of Midian!

For the words were like the blast of a Divine trumpet in Gideon's ears. When he heard, *he worshipped.* (v. 15.) It was God's message to him. Doubt and fear vanished. Extraordinary as the enterprise was, and apparently rash to the verge of madness, he was inspired with confidence, and returning to the little company of three hundred, he gave

the word of command; "*Arise, for the Lord hath delivered into your hand the host of Midian!*" (v. 15.)

Then, a Divine spirit of wisdom guiding him, Gideon made what was, on military principles, a perfect disposition of his little force, and this is worthy of notice, as showing the co-ordination of Divine wisdom with the employment of sagacious instrumentality. He divided his men into three companies. This is the rule in all well organized military arrangements. Right, Left, Centre; thus are all modern armies ordered for battle. But he had only three hundred men. It would be hopeless to succeed in a regular attack; his plan of operations, then, was to produce a panic in the sleeping host, and this was done by spreading out his companies so as to cover three sides of the camp. Then, instead of giving a trumpet to each company or troop, he placed a trumpet in the hands of every single man. The trumpeters of the troops that returned home doubtless left their trumpets behind them; and, as there were nearly thirty thousand who had returned home, reckoning one trumpet to every hundred men, there would be about three hundred trumpets available. Then each man had given to him a pitcher, such as would be carried for drinking purposes, and each pitcher had a torch placed inside. The purpose of these was soon made manifest.

All now being ready, in the middle watch of the night:—(these arrangements having been made under cover of darkness)—Gideon ordered that there should be a simultaneous blowing of the trumpets, a smashing of the pitchers, a display of the torches, and a shouting, "**THE SWORD OF THE LORD, AND OF GIDEON!**"

One can imagine the tremendous effect of all this. It would give an irresistible impression to the watch that they were surrounded by an immense host. Three hundred trumpets blowing simultaneously; with the crash of the pitchers to resemble the drawing of swords, and the clash of weapons! The flaring of apparently innumerable torches, the shouting of men. On the south side, the west side, the north side, all in the darkness, while the denizens of the camp were awakened from sleep by the terrible sights and sounds about them, is it to be wondered at that a panic arose

and spread through the whole host; that every man seized his weapon, and attacked the man next him, that there was a rushing, and a trampling, and a hasty mounting of camels and horses, the uproar increasing as the panic spread, until after a terrible slaughter of one another, the whole host was in flight eastward across the plain, every man fancying, as he urged his camel to speed, that the men around him were the pursuers and not the pursued.

As the Midianites were broken up and fled, Gideon sent messengers to the neighbouring tribes, and a host of Israelites gathered together, probably the very men who had been sent home but a few days before; the men of Naphthali, and Asher, and Mamasseh, all of them within a few hours of swift travel; with the men of Mount Ephraim also, to pursue the discomfited Midianites, and cut them off at the fords of Jordan.

Thus was realized one of the grandest triumphs of Faith recorded in Sacred history; and the remarkable thing about it is that in the onset of the Israelites not a sword was drawn! To them it was a bloodless battle. Their weapons were trumpets, and pitchers and lamps; none of which could hurt a single man. Yet the end attained was as effectual as if victory had been purchased at the cost of thousands of Israelitish lives. Thus the God of Israel demonstrated His power to save, without respect to numbers, or even arms and weapons; yet, withal, making full use of ordinary and natural means.

This, it may be said, characterized the spiritual warfare of the New Testament times.

It was by "the foolishness of preaching" (not, as some one wisely said, by foolish preaching) that the strongholds of paganism were overthrown; that the glory might be to God alone. (I Cor. i., 21.)

THE PURSUIT.

Yet, at the very outset of this pursuit, the strange spirit of jealousy between tribe and tribe that was so characteristic of this people, breaks out prominently. It was the tribe of

Ephraim that manifested it; always a bold and forward tribe, and, in future days, leaders in rebellion under Jeroboam. The men of Ephraim captured the Midianite chiefs, slew them, and brought their heads to Gideon, at the same time chiding him sharply because he had not invited them when gathering his hosts for battle. And now another trait in the character of Gideon is manifest, viz., his tact and wisdom. If he had met chiding with chiding, there would doubtless have ensued a quarrel. But he gave that kind of gentle and politic answer that always "turns away wrath." He praises their zeal and courage, and points out, in very pretty figurative language, how much their reward exceeded his. "*Is not the gleanings of the grapes of Ephraim better than the whole vintage of Abi-ezer?*" Abi-ezer being his own district. *God hath delivered into your hand the Princes of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb. And what was I able to do in comparison of you?* (Chap. viii., 2, 3.)

Who could resist so modest an appeal as that? and from a man who had been singled out by God as the leader of the whole enterprise. Thus the narrative immediately adds: "*Then their anger was appeased when they heard that.*" As well, indeed, it might.

So the pursuit went on, and Gideon, with the three hundred heroes of the bloodless battle, came to Jordan, and passed over;—as the narrative touchingly adds, "*faint, yet pursuing!*" A phrase that has been handed down to these generations as expressive of many who are running the Christian race, sorely tried, heavily pressed, and at times almost ready to give up; yet still holding on, in faith and hope, "*looking to Jesus the author and finisher of faith.*" And the example of these men of faith of the olden time has cheered many a Christian soldier of the present.

But again we meet with a strange instance of churlishness and meanness on the part of some Israelites who dwelt east of Jordan. These *men of Succoth* seem to have lost all national spirit and feeling during the years of idolatry and alienation from the worship of God. And their conduct proves the wisdom of the visits to Jerusalem which are enjoined in the law to be made three times in the year; a

provision tending, as has been shown, to promote a high degree of national fellowship; and to break down tribal narrowness and selfishness. (v. 5.)

These men of Succoth, had the intolerable meanness to refuse to give food to the fainting soldiers of Gideon. "*Give, I pray you,*" said the leader, "*loaves of bread to the people that follow me; for they be faint, and I am pursuing after Zeba and Zalmunna, kings of Midian.*" To which these men of Succoth replied, covering themselves with everlasting shame: *Are the hands of Zeba and Zalmunna now in thy hand, that we should give bread to thine army?* There seems in this reply a combination of the jealousy of the little souls who refuse to join a hazardous enterprise and slight them that undertake it, with a sort of calculation of a possible future in which the fleeing Midianites might return, and take vengeance on all who had helped their enemies. For the last is the only explanation of their reference to Zeba and Zalmunna, as not being yet in Gideon's power.

Such treacherous and disloyal conduct was very different from the chiding of the men of Ephraim, who were active in pursuit, and only angry because they were not allowed to do more.

These men of Succoth were traitors to the national cause; they were aiding and abetting the enemy; by refusing to assist the warriors who were pursuing them. Gideon was right, therefore, in threatening them with severe punishment when he returned successful, as he was confident he would, by the Lord's help.

His appeal to the men of Peniel (name of sacred memory, for it was there, on the other side of Jordan, that Jacob wrestled and prevailed), met with the same surly refusal,—and led to the same threat of severe and deserved punishment,—when he returned in peace, as he was confident he would, having, now that such signal signs of blessing had been vouchsafed to him, an unbounded faith that God would give him victory to the end. So, then, still pursuing, he comes up to the shattered remnant of the Midianitish force, terribly reduced, though still formidable, (for they yet numbered fifteen thousand), attacks them, takes the two chiefs prisoners, and drives off the remainder, who flee in alarm

at the very sound of his name. This remnant was now on the border of their own desert country. To pursue them further was impossible.

Gideon, returning with the two powerful chiefs, his prisoners, makes his way to Succoth;—and shows his prisoners to the men who scorned him; and—as the expressive Scripture phrase is—he *made them to know* his power by scourging them with briars and thorns, as they well deserved.

The men of Peniel seem to have been worse offenders, for he not only broke down their tower, as he had threatened, but put many of them to death.

Then he proceeded to dispose of the two Midianitish chiefs. They had slain some men at Mount Tabor, and Gideon learned that they were his brothers. If they had saved Gideon's brothers, Gideon would have spared their lives. But they had slain them, probably in the mere wantonness of cruelty. Gideon, therefore, put them to death. (v. 18, 19.)

Returning thus completely victorious, Gideon is asked to become the ruler of the people with an hereditary succession. With a true instinct of what is the Divine will he refuses: "*I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you, the Lord shall rule over you!*" The idea evidently is that he would not exercise *kingly* authority; for as a Judge and protector he did exercise authority for forty years; all in strict subserviance to the rule of the Almighty king.

A foolish act of which he was guilty after the rout of the Midianites is referred to in the next chapter.

CHAPTER VI.

GIDEON. ABIMELECH. JEPHTHAH.

(Judges ix., x., xi.)

Gideon sullied his fame by one most foolish act, and we may well wonder that so faithful a man as he could be guilty of it. But the narration of it proves the faithfulness of the story, which, like other Scripture narratives, is no mere glorifying of Jewish heroes, but a faithful chronicle of the doings of imperfect men. Tempted, Gideon was, in his great honor and prosperity; and that he fell into temptation is only to say that he was like other men. And in this we have again the old lesson: "*Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.*" For it is in the very hour of spiritual triumph that temptation often comes.

Gideon, after refusing the crown, gathered the golden ornaments of the Midianites; and of them made an *Ephod*, which, it is said, *became a snare to Gideon and his house*, and estranged the people from God. How this came about may probably be seen on considering that the Ephod was a part of the dress of the High Priest; and that the making of such a garment of the rarest and costliest materials, at a time when, apparently, no high priest was exercising his functions, and no tabernacle sacrifices were being offered, would only suggest that Gideon himself should continue to do what he had done at the outset of his career, to minister at an altar and offer sacrifices thereon. The altar he had built on the rock of Ophrah was doubtless still standing; naturally enough, then, or returning from his victorious pursuit, he might think of offering thereon a sacrifice of thanksgiving. And, with equal naturalness, might he conceive the idea of fashioning a dress like the High Priest's, of great rarity and costliness, out of the golden ornaments taken from the Midianites. This was what was done; an

apparently innocent thing in itself, under the circumstances, in the absence of a regular tabernacle worship. But it can easily be conceived how liable this would be to abuse; how Gideon, having this costly garment, might be desirous to display it frequently; and so gradually come to assume one function after another of the High Priest's office. And the people, with the little true discernment that so often characterized them, would come to look on this costly and beautiful garment as something sacred; so that, like the holy coat of Treves in these modern times, it would become an object of idolatry. Thus it was a snare to Gideon and to his house, (v. 27) as such things have proved to be again and again in modern times. But the land had peace for another period of forty years, Gideon, during this period of ease, falling into the great error of those times of multiplying to himself wives, who bore him many children, but dying in a good old age and being buried in his native village of Ophrah in the tribe of Manasseh.

Then ensued that reaction and relapse which seemed the inevitable course of events when a strong and good man died; a relapse like that of England under the second Charles. They fell off into the worship of *Baalim* (plural of *Baal*) various forms of this licentious god; and attached themselves particularly to one, *Baal-berith*,—or the god of the covenant; a name of mockery evidently, and indicating a lightness and folly hard to be conceived of.

And now comes a strange narrative, indeed, of bloody deeds and murder, of lawlessness and folly, such as leads to the conviction that this people were no whit better by nature than the Canaanites themselves; which leads also to another conviction, viz., that but for the overruling purpose and government of Almighty God, they would inevitably have passed away like the rest of the nations surrounding them, long before the time when Greece and Rome came to dominate the world.

But these Old Testament narratives and biographies are all of a special Divine dealing and government in furtherance of deep and far-reaching purposes and fore ordinations,

in pursuance of which men and their descendants were called out by Divine grace, and given revelations and covenants peculiar to themselves; for purposes not always apparent when given, but which were revealed in the fulness of time. Human nature in this people was as corrupt and as contrary to the mind of God as in any other people. And left to run its course, it would doubtless have brought about in process of time their extinction as a people. Their perpetual lapses into idolatry, and the wickedness consequent upon idolatry, were of themselves; their recovery and entrance on a higher plane of virtue and deity was wholly from Divine influences; given in pursuance of the great governmental plan of redemption by a Messiah; but, as a rule, always in answer to the cry of misery.

The interval between the rule of Gideon and that of Jephthah is one of these periods of lapse and falling away. First came their turning to Baal. Then their desertion of the house of Gideon, and their support of the daring and murderous Abimelech, son of his concubine. Not only daring and murderous, but crafty and ambitious, was this man, Abimelech. Then came the connivance and help of the people of Shechem in the slaying of Gideon's sons; all of whom Abimelech murdered except one, Jotham by name, thus wading in blood to the throne, as men have done in modern times.

For it is noticeable that the people of Shechem, in public assembly gathered, made Abimelech *king*. Gideon, loyal to his God, refused to be king; Abimelech, the ingrate and murderer, scrupled not.

The terse and fine parable of the trees choosing thistle for their king, (Chap. ix., 8 to 15) spoken by Gideon's youngest son, has become one of the sacred classics, and is a picture, perfectly true to life, of the caprices of a popular election, when the people are morally debased. The stream is not better than the fountain. The men of Shechem chose one like themselves to rule over them.

But Jotham's prediction of its consequences displayed as shrewd an apprehension as the parable itself: *Fire would come out of the bramble and devour the cedars of Lebanon.*

Abimelech could not but be a tyrant and an oppressor; devouring the substance of the people. *And, as a natural sequence, fire would come out of Shechem and devour Abimelech!* So it fell out, for when he had reigned three years, a bitter feud broke out between the people of Shechem and Abimelech. The people of Shechem revolted against his authority, chose a leader, set spies against him in the mountains, fortified the city, and *in the house of their God they ate and drank, and cursed Abimelech.* He, on his part, gathered a force, besieged the city, took it, laid it waste and strewed it with salt. Thus fire went out of the bramble; and retribution came on Shechem. (v. 22 to 45). But Abimelech's day of retribution came also. Besieging another city, and coming near to the wall of a tower where the people had taken refuge, he was nearly killed by a piece of mill stone thrown down by a woman. Then calling hastily to his armour-bearer, he commanded him to draw his sword and slay him, "*that,*" as he said, "*men say not of me 'a woman slew him!'*"

Thus, then, retribution came on all concerned in the foul murder of the sons of Gideon, the narrative being one of the most vivid and picturesque in the whole Old Testament history, and very true to human nature and the developments of such times.

After Abimelech's death the rule was taken up by men in the old order of Judges. The first of these was Tola, a man of Issachar; the second, Jair, a Gileadite. These two seem to have kept the land at peace, and during the forty-five years of their administration the people seem to have kept their allegiance to Jehovah.

But, again, the monotonous order of events came round. Another generation arises, who do evil in the sight of the Lord, *and follow after Baalim, and Ashtaroth, and the gods of Syria, and the gods of Sidon, and the gods of Moab, and the gods of the children of Ammon, and the gods of the Philistines;* a perfect flood of idolatry of every description known to the nations round about. (Chap. x., 6.)

Then came the usual well merited chastisement. The anger of the Lord *waxed hot*, and punishment came. First,

the Philistines oppressed them. But the nation of the Ammonites—whose country was in the East, beyond Jordan, attacked the tribes East of Jordan and subdued them. Then, these warlike Ammonites, related to the Israelites by blood, carried their arms across the Jordan into the regions of Judah and Benjamin, and harassed those, who, apparently, had not known the scourge of war for generations; and, consequently fell an easy prey.

The cry of the oppressed people to the Lord brought forth a remonstrance like that we read of in the later prophets: Ye cried; and I delivered you oftentimes from your oppressors. (Chap. x., 12.) *But now ye have forsaken me and served other gods; wherefore I will deliver you no more! Go and cry unto the gods which ye have chosen; let them deliver you in the time of your tribulation.*

A terrible sentence, indeed; yet like other threats of Divine judgment, capable of being turned aside by repentance and amendment.

So now, as it had been before, there was national humiliation, confession, submission and prayer; and again a turning of a God of compassion to the oppressed: *His soul was grieved for the misery of Israel.* (v. 16). After darkness, the dawn; and its manifestation was, as before, in the raising up of a strong man to deliver them.

JEPHTHAH.

The tide of conflict had, after a time, returned, and overflowed the country, east of Jordan; that land of Gilead, which stretched eastwards out to the very border of the great Arabian desert, and southward to the territory of the people of Ammon. This was that hilly country, where, in former times, Jacob had seen visions, and, after that ever memorable all-night wrestling, had met his brother in peace; from whence, in after times, issued that great prophet Elijah. Three tribes occupied this region, which was one of pastures and uplands, famous for flocks and herds, viz., half the tribe of Manasseh, the tribe of Gad, and the tribe of Reuben.

The assurance of the favor of God after they turned to Him in penitence had evidently given the people heart and hope. We hear of them now as gathered together, organized for war, but wanting a leader in whom they had confidence. So the people and princes said one to another: "*What man is he that will begin to fight against the children of Ammon? he shall be head of all the inhabitants of Gilead.*" (v. 18).

And, of all the men who might be thought fit for the command, the assembly settled upon one who, at that time, was an exile from his father's house, and living beyond the borders of Israel a somewhat roving life at the head of a band exactly similar to that which David gathered about him when driven away by King Saul. *Vain fellows*, they are called here. (Chap. xi., 8.) David's band was composed of men *who were in distress, or were in debt, or were discontented*, (1 Sam. xxii., 2.) So probably was Jephthah's.

Jephthah, like Abimelech, was a natural son, but grew up a *mighty man of valor*. The lawful sons of the house were naturally jealous of him, thrust him out and compelled him to flee, like David fled to the wilder parts of the land, where naturally enough, a roving band gathered about him. A story like that of famous Robin Hood or Rob Roy of our own English and Scottish history was Jephthah's. And, like them, it is a question if he was not better than the rulers of the land. So, in time of extremity the heart of the people turned to *the mighty man of valor*. The elders went to fetch him, with the message: "*Come, and be our captain, that we may fight with the children of Ammon.*" (v. 6).

After a little parley he consents, and in this parleying, he gives evidence of his faithfulness to the God of Israel. "*If the Lord deliver the children of Ammon before me,*" he says; —not,—if, I, the mighty man of valour prevail against them. And, so, when the covenant was solemnly made between him and the people, *he uttered all his words before the Lord!* making the covenant with Him also.

In this Spirit of loyalty to God and faith in Divine help Jephthah enters upon his command.

But, singular to say, his first steps were not warlike, but peaceful. He sent messengers to the king of the Ammo-

nites, saying: "What hast thou to do with me that thou art come to fight in my land?"

The Ammonite king answered, very disingenuously, "*Because Israel took away my land; now then restore it peacefully.*"

But Jephthah well knew the falsity of this pretense, and sent messengers again, who, in Jephthah's name recounted in most eloquent language the true story of the entrance of the Israelites into the land, and showed that they passed the Ammonite country in peace, (Deut. ii., 37) and took none of their land but only the lands of the Amorites and of the king of Basham. Then he makes this eloquent appeal:

"So now the Lord God of Israel hath dispossessed the Amorites from before his people Israel, and shouldst thou possess it? Wilt thou not possess that which Chemosh thy God giveth thee to possess? . . . So whosoever the Lord our God shall drive out from before us, them will we possess. . . . Wherefore, I have not sinned against thee, but thou doest me wrong to war against me; the Lord, the Judge, be the judge this day between the children of Israel and the children of Ammon!"

Here shines out the spirit of the man of faith, which entitled him to a place amongst the recorded heroes of faith in the New Testament. The solemn asseveration of trust in the living God, the operation that it was *He* who had given Israel the land they occupied, the appeal to Jehovah as the final judge, are all the outgoings of an Israelite of the true type. And not less noticeable is the tone of consideration and kindness shown in this appeal to the Ammonite king. For, evidently, Jephthah recognized that he was a son of Abraham, as Edom and Moab were, a fact fully recognized by Moses in arranging the march to the land of promise, round the eastern shore of the Dead Sea. And this by Divine direction. For as we read in Deut. ii., 19, the Lord spoke to Moses and said:—"When thou comest nigh over against the children of Ammon, distress them not, nor meddle with them; for I will not give thee of the land of the children of Ammon for a possession."

But the Ammonites for ages had departed far from the Jehovah, and had probably long forgot their ancestry, and

now as they refused to listen to the peaceable overtures of Jephthah a conflict became inevitable. Then, like many a brave captain of modern times, who avoids war if he can, but when fighting is unavoidable, fights like a lion, Jephthah, filled with the Spirit of God (the spirit of might and power) gathers his forces together and makes a rapid march to meet the Ammonites.

But, previously, he seeks the Lord, and, like the man of profound piety that he was, he makes a solemn *Vow*. The vow he made was rash, no matter how it is interpreted, and has stamped his name with a strange and remarkable interest to all generations. The vow was almost certainly, in any reasonable construction of language, not what it has been supposed to be; for reasons discussed in the Note to this chapter.

The intent was good. The spirit was that of profound devotion. But the manner was bad; and the action that resulted has given rise to a thousand cavillings. Jephthah vowed that he would consecrate to the Lord, or offer as burnt offering, whatever first met him, *coming out of the door of his house*, in case he returned victorious from the contest with the Ammonites. (The marginal reading gives the true sense of the original, beyond, doubt, as the revised version does not.)

Then he passed over and arrayed his forces against the children of Ammon;—the Lord delivered them into his hands; he smote them from city to city, subduing twenty cities in all; and drove them back to their own land *with a very great slaughter*. *Thus the children of Ammon were subdued before the children of Israel!* (v. 38.)

Then, returning in triumph, he draws near to his home, when, to his distress and confusion, he meets his only child, a daughter, a young maiden, coming forth to greet him with timbrels and with dances.

Now, what do we see?

The strong man cries out in his anguish—*Alas! my daughter! Thou hast caused me great trouble! I have vowed, and cannot go back!*

The maiden, with wonderful submissiveness and piety;—answers: *My father, if thou hast opened thy mouth unto the Lord, do to me according to that word!*—then adding—with

a fine touch of patriotic fervor;—*forasmuch as the Lord hath taken vengeance for thee of thine enemies—the children of Ammon.*

Then, at her request, two months were given her to prepare for the sacrifice, she would require to make in consecrating her life to perpetual virginity. And at the expiration of the time, she returned to her father, *who did with her according to his vow.* (v. 39.)

This was, we conceive, to consign her to a perpetual state of virginity, in the service of Jehovah. And thereafter, for four days in the year, it became a custom for the daughters of Israel to go yearly, to lament for this most pious, obedient, devoted maiden.

THE PARTICULAR CHARACTER OF THE SACRIFICE OF JEPHTHAH'S DAUGHTER.

That she was not burnt alive and offered in sacrifice, but simply consecrated to a life of separation and virginity, will be evident from these considerations:—

1. If she was to be burnt and offered in sacrifice—to whom was she to be offered?

To Jehovah;—clearly. But such a sacrifice would be one of the abominations of idolatry that defiled the land; and was expressly forbidden, under penalty of death, in the Law. (Lev. xx, 2.) It is evident from the whole narrative that Jephthah knew the law, and that he had a most reverential regard for God.

2. Then, the original language of the vow admits the meaning, "I will consecrate to the Lord—or (instead of and) I will offer it as a burnt offering. If a human being, I will dedicate it in separation; if an animal,—then I will offer it as a burnt offering.

3. But why Jephthah's sore anguish when he beholds his daughter,—does not this suggest the more terrible alternative? By no means.

The narrative explains that she was *his only child; beside her he had neither son nor daughter.* (v. 34.) Doubtless his wife was dead. Thus, in devoting his daughter to separation and virginity, he was depriving himself forever of the light and joy and ornament of his house; surely a sufficient cause for any depth of sorrow. For in that case she could never marry,—therefore never continue his posterity, and he must live and die a lonely man.

4. The terms of the narrative are utterly inconsistent with the idea that so scandalous and cruel a deed was perpetrated. Asking for a respite of two months, it was that she might bewail,—not her untimely death, and horrible torture—but her *virginity!* She was to remain virgin; never to marry, and so be shut out from a hope generally cherished by Hebrew women of being an ancestor of the Messiah.

And the narrative again emphasizes the fact of her virginity when recording that her father did with her according to his vow.

5. In describing the custom of lamenting her four days in the year, it is said that the daughters of Israel *went* yearly to lament;—clearly suggesting that they *went to visit and sympathise* with this devoted maiden in the place of her consecration.

6. The contrary view can only be maintained by imagining that human nature, and the ways and thoughts of men and women in those days were absolutely different in kind from those which now prevail.

This, as has been frequently shown in these studies, is an entire misconception.

CHAPTER VII.

SAMSON.

(Judges xiii., xiv.)

Between the events noted in the last chapter and the birth of that extraordinary man, Samson, there are only two that are worthy of note. The first is another outbreak of jealousy on the part of that restless tribe of Ephraim, of an exactly similar nature to that which they displayed to Gideon. They gathered their force, marched northward and sent Jephthah a message of complaint that he had not called upon them to aid in the Ammonite campaign; a message founded on falsehood; and accompanied by a threat of unpardonable insolence: "*We will burn thine house upon thee with fire!*" Yet the whole is perfectly conformable to human nature. Men do exactly the same thing in these days. Jephthah, victorious, is envied by the men of Ephraim;—Jephthah, defeated, would never have heard from them!

But in sending such a message, they reckoned without their host. Jephthah replies first calmly, refuting their allegations; then protests against their marshalling force against him, (much as the princes of Europe were wont to protest against the false pretences and insolence of Napoleon) then, finally, gathering his army together, flushed with their victory against the Ammonites, he attacked the forces of Ephraim and utterly routed them.

Then there occurs the curious story of the testing of the fleeing fugitives by requiring each to pronounce *Shibboleth*. The Ephraimites, like some modern European nations, did not pronounce *sh*—but sounded only the *s*. So they said *Sibboleth*. By this test thousands were discerned to be men of Ephraim, and treated accordingly.

Six years was the full term of Jephthah's office as Judge. He only held it for this short space; and one may well sur-

mise that grief for the loss of his daughter's society shortened his days.

After an interval, in which the land was at peace, being ruled by men who have left little record but their names, there came another falling away and another chastisement. It was about this time that the Philistine nation attained such development, whose conflicts with Israel are so marked a feature of their history for many generations.

These people occupied the wide and fertile plain by the Great Sea, which lay westward from the territory of Judah. The border country was one of hills and valleys, intersected with ravines and rocky heights and passes, up which foraging and raiding parties could make their way to the high plateau of the interior, where the principal towns of the Israelites were situated.

The Philistines were civilized; they were idolaters, and had built temples; they had a regularly organized society; but, above all, they were skilful in war. After the death of Jephthah they had acquired a predominance over the adjoining territory of Dan and Judah, and though their hand was much less heavy than that of the Ammonites, and not to be compared in severity with that of the Midianites, they certainly *oppressed* Israel, probably by exacting severe tribute. This lasted for forty years.

But while this oppression was running its course, it was revealed to a good, but childless, couple, living close to the Philistine border, that a son should be born to them; who should be consecrated as a Nazarite from his birth. The announcement made to the parents of John the Baptist is almost identical with this, but the subsequent development is as contrary as can well be conceived. For, while John the Baptist fulfilled all expectations, and became a "burning and shining light," Samson's career, after its first developments, was one of violent and restless outbreaks, of indulged passion, of disgrace, defeat, and untimely death; only redeemed by the dignity with which death was met; and by some appearance of turning to God at the close of his life.

But the father and mother of Samson were eminently single-minded and devout Israelites, who shewed a deep and

earnest concern for guidance from God in bringing up the child that was to be born. Manoah,—that was the name of the father,—on hearing that a son was to be born, entreated the Lord, and said; “*Let the man of God come again to us, and teach us what we shall do to the child that shall be born.*” (Chap. xiii., v. 8.) (This in reference to the angel that appeared to his wife.) And when Manoah himself saw the angel, the same thought was upon his heart: “*How shall we order the child, and how shall we do unto him?*” Pure and earnest souls,—it is strange, indeed, to think of the career of one who was thus prayed for before he was born.

This angel,—so-called,—seems to have been none other than the Son of God Himself; for when Manoah asked his name,—he answered: “*Why askest thou thus after my name? Seeing it is Secret;*” the word *Secret* being rendered in the margin, *WONDERFUL*,—the same word used in the great description of the Messiah in the prophecy of Isaiah. (Isaiah ix., 6.)

In due time the woman bare a son, and called his name Samson (meaning Sunlight). And the child grew, and the Lord blessed him. (v. 24.)

So far all was well.

Growing up, *the Spirit of the Lord began to move him, at times, in the camp of Dan*;—the spirit, doubtless, of resistance to oppression, and desire to deliver Israel, and power to use his great bodily strength to that end.

And now commences the story of a life so different in character from that of judges like Gideon, or Jephthah, or Deborah, that one is inclined, at first, to marvel at the prominence given to him in the Bible story. Yet, reflection will convince us that it is told in such fulness in order that profound lessons of life may be drawn from it.

It is to be noted that this man was a Nazarite from his birth; and, therefore, had never touched either wine or strong drink; a fact from which two somewhat opposite practical lessons may be drawn; the first, that abstinence from wine is perfectly compatible with a high degree of physical strength; the other, that such abstinence by no means ensures a high degree of moral development. This last is a lesson that may well be pondered in days when total

abstinence is by some well-disposed persons supposed to carry with it, as a matter of course, not only a prevention of certain physical and social evils, but a certain degree of moral and even spiritual development.

The first event recorded of Samson is an exhibition of wilfulness, and defiance both of Divine Law, and of the wishes of father and mother, in choosing a Philistine woman for a wife. "*Is there no woman amongst the daughters of thy brethren,*" they said, "*that thou goest to take a wife of the uncircumcised Philistines?*" (Chap. xiv., 3.)

But, with the wilfulness of an ill-governed soul, he simply replied: *Get her for me;—for she pleaseth me well!* She pleaseth me well;—The love of self-gratification, the overpowering domination of self-indulgence, the absolute indifference to higher considerations, are only too conspicuous in this foolish answer. And here we have the key to the comparative uselessness of his life.

The story of his killing a young lion that roared against him in the vineyards of Timnath; (v. 5), of the feasting at his wedding, of the riddle he put forth; of the pouting and entreaty of his wife to tell her the secret, of his going down to Ashkelon and killing thirty men of the Philistines in order to get the spoil of their garments,—and finally of his leaving his newly wedded wife in a fit of causeless anger, are all a development of the same reckless, selfish, light-hearted, and foolish temper, exhibited in the answer to his father and mother. (v. 5 to 20.)

But,—it may be said,—and very reasonably—are we not told that his choosing a Philistine wife was *of the Lord*.

True.—It was one of those cases where the Divine Ruler overrules the wayward passions of men to accomplish his own far-seeing purposes. God's purpose at this time was to bring disaster upon the Philistines, that their oppressive rule might be broken. For they then had *dominion over Israel*.

But, again,—does not the narrative declare that when he went down to Ashkelon *the Spirit of the Lord came upon him*; before he slew the thirty men? Is the Spirit of the Lord a spirit of raiding and murder?

This may well be asked. But let us consider;—is not this

again a case where the passions of men are overruled for the accomplishment of an ordered end? Samson, foolish and headstrong as he was, was evidently raised up to check, if not to bring to an end, the oppression of the Philistines. And the slaying of these thirty was the beginning of a war which ended only with Samson's life. And wild and irregular though that warfare was, it answered the Divine purpose; for we hear no more of any oppression of theirs or even of any rising up in arms against Israel for several generations afterwards.

Then comes another strange story; and, indeed, one may wonder that such strange stories should find a place in Scripture at all, seeing that the narrative was all ordered and overseen by Divine wisdom.

But in truth, this narrative of Samson is almost wholly one of warning; a beacon light to show what follies and wild courses a man may fall into even though he be a Nazarite, and consecrated from the womb, and brought up in the fear of God, when he lives only to please himself, setting no restraint on his passions and impulses; and, even when doing a good work for God and his country, doing it in so wild and disorderly a way as to mar its effect, and only half accomplish what he was well fitted to do.

For what availed, for any serious purpose of delivering his country from the oppression of the Philistines, this wild adventure of catching three hundred foxes, and sending them, with lighted firebrands tied to their tails into the cornfields and vineyards of the oppressors? Or what availed his slaughtering the men who had burnt his wife's father and his wife with fire? It was not public duty but private revenge that impelled him. What availed even that greater slaughter of a thousand men with the jaw-bone of an ass, even though it was done by a sort of supernatural strength? (One may pause when reading of these numbers, and consider whether there may not have crept in errors of transcribers copying manuscripts in those early times, and so magnify hundreds into thousands, or tens into hundreds?—all which might very easily happen without impairing the absolute truth of the original narrative, or the lesson to be

derived from Samson's life.) And as to the supernatural strength given him by *the Spirit of the Lord coming mightily upon him*:—by which strength he slew such numbers of Israel's oppressors,—was it not the same as had occurred before,—when the wayward impulses of the man were overruled, in the government and providence of God, to the punishment of Israel's enemies and the humbling of the pride of the Philistines?

Yet, in a fashion, he judged Israel for twenty years, in which, probably, by these great displays of physical strength, the Philistines were kept from raiding and overrunning the territory of Israel, and oppressing it as they did aforetime.

At the end of these twenty years, however, another series of events happen which display, more vividly than even the ill-regulated and self-willed character of the man, and which resulted in that tragic close of his life, which has cast a strange, romantic glamour over his death.

There is first his going down to the city of Gaza, and his indulgence of licentious passion; his visit being apparently without object;—then the conspiracy of the people of Gaza to slay him, and his circumventing them by the extraordinary exploit of tearing up the gates of the city at midnight by main force, and carrying them off to the adjacent hill country. An extraordinary display of strength indeed, but having as little directly to do with the work of protecting and delivering Israel, as the feats of strength of an athlete in a circus have to do with the defence and protection of England.

After this we have the wretched story of his acquaintance and love for the Philistine woman, Delilah, and his final ruin and fall through that intercourse.

Not the first nor the last strong man was he whose life has been marred and spoiled,—if not utterly ruined, by a designing and wicked woman. Ancient story has many instances of this; as witness Cleopatra and Mark Antony; and so has modern story, as the chronicles of English and Scottish kings will tell. (See *Marmion*, Canto v.)

It must have been in some frontier town of the Philistine country that this woman lived, and where Samson spent day after day in her society, neglecting his duty as judge, and

giving himself wholly up to self-indulgence, the bane of his life, and the secret of its uselessness.

Delilah was bribed by the lords of the Philistines to betray Samson. While he was wickedly neglectful of his duty as Judge, and wasting his time in the enemy's territory, they were on the alert in their country's interest, and watching the opportunity to destroy him.

Yet they had a dread of his strength; as, indeed, they might well have, after such a tremendous display of it as that of tearing up the gates of Gaza.

Delilah was willing enough to be bribed, and watched her opportunity to worm out of him the secret of his strength.

With the Philistine Lords lying in wait she exerted all the arts of a designing woman; and after days of mockery, in which the same spirit of mischief is apparent on the part of Samson that he had shown so forcibly before, she pressed him with such reproaches as a wily woman would use. "*How canst thou say,*" she exclaimed,—"*that thou lovest me, when thine heart is not with me? Thou hast mocked me these three times, and hast not told me wherein thy strength lieth!*" Then as she pressed him daily with her words, and urged him; so that he was vexed unto death,—he told her all his heart;—(Chap. xvi., 15, 16)—and confessed that he had the vow of a Nazarite's consecration upon him. This vow bound him to drink no wine nor strong drink, and never to allow a razor to come upon his head. If I break this vow,—said he—*then my strength shall go from me, and I shall become as another man.* (v. 17.)

In possession of this fatal secret, she gave notice to the Philistine lords, and made him sleep—(the form of the narrative suggesting that this was by means of some sleeping potion she had prepared), took the money the lords had brought, and called for a man to shave the locks from his head.

Then, awakening him, she calls out to him as before, "*The Philistines be upon thee, Samson!*"

Now then, he, not knowing what had been done, arises and shakes himself. But the God of Israel had departed from him;—his supernatural strength was gone;—he could no longer resist the attack of the Philistine lords; who took him

prisoner; put out his eyes, carried him down to Gaza, the scene of his old triumph, bound him with brazen fetters, shut him up in prison, and compelled him to grind as one of the meanest malefactors. A pitiable ending indeed, of what might have been a very great career. For out of that prison house he never came.

The fact that his strength departed when he had broken his vow, suggests irresistibly that it was not the strength of a huge, muscular man only, by which he had done such wonderful deeds. It was a supernatural endowment, conferred for a purpose, namely to plague the Philistines; and had Sampson been such a man as Jephthah, or Gideon or Barak, with a mind to plan and organize, as well as an arm to strike,—had he been a man of prayer and piety and self-denial, he might have broken the Philistine power altogether, prevented the troubles which they caused in the days of Saul, and anticipated the victories of David himself.

But, Samson is a singular instance of a man who was endowed with a Divine faculty, who yet was low in *morale*, and knew not how to use the Divine gift. There have been others like him. Balaam was one; a man to whom a real Divine prophetic commission was given, yet going his own way after all, and dying an enemy of God and Israel.

Idolaters are always faithful to their gods; never failing to pray to them for help, and always giving thanks to them for victory. So now that this formidable enemy is in the power of the Philistines, they gather in the house of their god Dagon,—a fish-god— who was represented by images with the head and body of a man and the tail of a fish. Living on the sea-coast, this was a most natural form for their idolatry to take. And to this god they offered sacrifices, of what sort we are not informed; and rejoiced and praised their god who had delivered their enemy into their hand. It is noticeable that not once in Samson's life is there any mention of worship, or thank-offering for victory, or even of prayer, except only on one occasion, when he was thirsty. His time would appear to have been a time of godlessness, even if the people had forsaken idolatry; a condition of things possible enough, as we know from modern experience.

When a people, as a whole, forsake a religion like that of Rome, with so strong an element of idolatrous and sensuous

worship in it, they have a strong tendency to fall away from religion altogether. France in the Revolution, and since, is an example in point. But these Philistines did not forget their god. They rejoiced, and had a festival; and one would gather that the festival, as such often were, was one of riotous indulgence and merriment, like too many religious festivals of the church became in mediæval times.

The wretched prisoner was sent for to *make sport* for them. How would he make sport?

Most likely by being placed, blind as he was, in the midst of the temple, and being bade to find the door of exit; his vain attempts as he groped about, affording infinite merriment to the throng of his enemies. The house, we are told, was *full of men and women*. The scene recalls the brutal behaviour of the soldiers to our Divine Lord, when in the pretorium they blindfolded him, and then striking him on the face they cried out, *prophesy, who smote thee!*

But Samson was strangely avenged,—and his persecutors judged. In this extremity, thoughts of the God of his fathers returned to him. One may charitably hope that these last days of misery were days of repentance,—that grief for a misspent life was present, as well as hope in God and prayer for help. Yet the dominant thought is of vengeance for the loss of his eyes. And his prayer is simply that he may have,—*just for this once*, a return of his old strength, that he may be avenged for his loss.

It was not such a prayer as one might have expected to be answered. And, but that the answer would fall in with the Divine purpose of chastisement to the oppressors of Israel, it is not likely it would have been answered. But answered it was. A degree of strength surpassing anything ever bestowed upon him before was renewed to him now. And so, bending with his whole weight and strength against the pillars that supported the edifice, they fell; and with their fall, the whole edifice crashed down, burying Samson himself, and the vast multitude it contained, who had, but a little while before been shouting with exultation as he groped about in his wretched blindness,—“*So*,”—as the narrative gives it, “*the dead which he slew at his death were more than they which he slew in his life!*” (v. 30.)

But, alas!—what a life!—What lessons it has left behind.

And evidently the Holy Ghost has recorded its incidents so minutely that men might mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, for warning.

Here is a man who never drank wine or strong drink; yet wasted his life in licentious self-indulgence.

One may wonder that the "strange woman," Delilah, did not tempt him to break the Nazarite's vow, by taking wine, for a man who was so bent on self-indulgence in another form, would, it might be supposed, not be likely to show much resistance against that temptation. But it was not so. Through all the changes of his vicious and foolish life, he never erred in that direction.

So, *let him that thinketh he standeth*, because he is a total abstainer, *take heed lest he fall!* As to the warning to beware of self-will and breaking the Divine command in the important matter of marriage, it lies upon the surface. His self-will in this matter was the first step in his downward career. And so it has been with many in these days. For the precept and warning against marriage with unbelievers and idolaters sounded out by the Apostle Paul (II. Cor. vi., 14), are as applicable to-day as they were when written.

As to the warning conveyed in the story of his companionship with Delilah, and its disastrous consequences, that should sink deep into the hearts of men similarly tempted, who should learn to pray for such grace as Joseph showed when he cried out, in the hour of extreme spiritual danger: *How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God!* (Gen. xxxix., 9.)

And how clearly does this narrative teach that no birth of pious parents will avail; no mere vows and ordinances, either like those of the Nazarite, in ancient times, or the Christian Church, in this. A man may be born, baptized, and confirmed in the Christian faith, and yet, through thoughtlessness and wanton neglect, fall into habits of confirmed sin and godlessness.

How this narrative sounds out a warning, also, against trifling with sacred things, as Samson did with his Nazarite vow; a habit which became extremely common in the mediæval times of the Christian Church, and has survived even to this,—to the undoing of many souls, and the dishonouring of the religion of Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE REIGN OF LAWLESSNESS.

(Judges xvii., to the end.)

The emphasis with which it is repeatedly stated in these chapters, that, in the times spoken of, "*there was no king in Israel*," and that, "*every man did what was right in his own eyes*," (Chap. xvii., 6), is evidently of design. For the deeds of lawlessness recorded therein, the licentious lusts of one set of men, and the furious revenge of others, the aggression of discontented men upon a peaceful community, the barbarous slaughter which almost annihilated one of the tribes of Israel, and the means taken to preserve the remnant left, rather remind us of the deeds of ruthless savages, than the incidents which might be looked for in a community that had the law of God established amongst them, and had so recently been ministered to by rulers and prophets who have been among the most eminent of the human race. What,—one might well exclaim,—could be the reason of such developments of barbarity and wickedness at this time amongst this people of Israel? The answer would be,—that for a time in Israel, the voice of both Divine and human law was silent. Human nature had its own way, unchecked by the fear of punishment. *Men did what was right in their own eyes!*

These words, repeated again and again, sound almost like sarcasm, when taken in conjunction with such terrible narratives of wickedness. Is this, then, the natural development of human nature in a condition of perfect freedom?—this the outcome of that "liberty" which is so often extolled as sufficient of itself to ensure justice, and happiness amongst mankind? For what was it that men did when they were at liberty to do what they pleased? These chapters shall give us an example of it.

The first narrative, (Chap. xvii.), is that of a man of the

tribe of Ephraim, who, having stolen a large amount of silver from his mother, had restored it:—This mother then directs her son to make a graven and molten image *in the name of the Lord God*. This, strange to say, the man did,—And, as the narrative goes on to say, “*he had an house of gods, and consecrated one of his sons (v. 5) to be his priest.*”

Now, this idolatry was apparently done, *in the name of the Lord*;—a piece of mockery and profanity in reality, yet, one would suppose from the narrative, done in pure ignorance and blindness. In the name of the Lord, who had expressly forbidden any graven images to be made and worshipped, this man made a houseful of them! In the name of the Lord, who had expressly forbidden any assumption of the priest's office by any but the sons of Aaron, this man of the tribe of Ephraim, appoints his son to be a priest, and actually consecrates him.

Incredible—one might think: did we not know of the strange developments that have taken place, even in the Christian Church, and in times not so far distant from ourselves.

For what is much of medieval Christianity but a repetition of the doings of this man, Micah? The medieval Church proclaiming itself the sole guardian of the Divine law, and its sole interpreter; yet makes its places of assembly, like the house of Micah; *a house of Gods!* What meets the eye in these noble edifices? Graven images, molten images, the ephod and the teraphim! Is this not a striking case of making the law of God of none effect through tradition?

But is it not the case almost invariably that when men do “*that which is right in their own eyes,*” in religion, they develop a worship of molten and graven images? It is something to be seen with the eye, that human nature craves for;—and, under the specious pretext that the heart is reached through the eye, and that these material images set forth more plainly to the untutored mind the spiritual realities of the Divine, teachers and leaders of the Christian faith, even in these days, make the Church a place of graven images?

But does not all experience show that this is an entire mistake. The mind of the untutored is not raised to spiritual conceptions by looking at material things. On the

contrary, the invariable and prevailing tendency, constantly operating in all places and times, in Christendom and heathendom alike, is for the mind, to rest upon and be satisfied with the material image, and not to rise beyond it; —to worship and reverence the material, to the exclusion and forgetfulness of the spiritual! It has been so where the philosophical systems of the East have prevailed. The Buddhist religion, which at its foundation was wholly one of spiritual contemplation, has become almost wholly one of molten and graven images. Such also has been the development of most of the other religions of India. So also the religions of more barbarous races in other continents, and in the islands of the sea. And so it was, constantly, with the Jews themselves.

And in all, and at all times, the effect is to deprave the spiritual life, and to make men forget and ignore, instead of remembering, the great God who made the heavens and the earth.

But, further, with idolatry, invariably comes loose morality. Men cannot attach the idea of government and law, of watchful cognizance of their deeds, of reward and punishment, to molten and graven images? Those who bow down to them know as well as others, that though they have eyes they see not, though they have ears they hear not. The habit of looking to images with reverence, of bowing down to them, and thinking of them as sacred, invariably results in these being thought of as the only divinity with which men have to do. But how can men have "*the fear of God before their eyes*," who practically have no god but the image which they know can neither see nor hear them? Joseph resisted a most powerful temptation by asking: "*How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God!*" Would it be possible for the thought of an image, or a churchful of images, to exercise such a power as this?

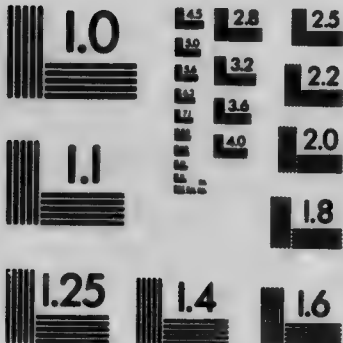
No, idolatry undermines morality. That is a universal law; true of all times, places, and forms of religion, heathen or Christian.

It is natural, then, when the narrative of these times of lawlessness begins with the defiance of God's commands respecting duty to Himself; to find it associated with gross



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breaches of the law of justice and righteousness towards men. And so it proved.

First, however, we notice the act of Micah in taking in a wandering Levite, consecrating him as a priest; and, in his gross ignorance or contempt of Divine law, saying to himself, (v. 13), "*Now know I that the Lord will do me good, seeing that I have a Levite to my priest.*"

What he had done was little better than what he did in making one of his sons a priest. For it was provided in the Divine law that the office of the Levites should be strictly limited to the care of the vessels, and material of the tabernacle, and should have nothing to do with the offering of sacrifice.

Yet this foolish man thought he was pleasing God by his action. Not the only one, by any means, who have thought they were pleasing God, while their action was directly contrary to His revealed will. Abundance of this we have examples of in Christian times.

In the next chapter, then, we have an account of a fierce raid, by the tribe of Dan, upon a quiet and innocent people, *dwelling securely*, and minding their own business, occupying a fertile country to the north of that settled by any of the tribes. Yet, these men, with purposes of blood and murder in their hearts, must have the sanction of religion; even as in these modern days, the brigands of the Italian mountains, reverently place themselves under the protection of the Virgin, before setting out to plunder, and, if need be, to murder.

And this reminds us that devotion to the Virgin, operates precisely in the same way, and has the same radical defect, as the devotion to images. It has no deterrent effect on wickedness, for it is not associated with Divine government and retribution. There is no awe upon the conscience. No devotee has the "*fear of the Virgin* before his eyes." No man says, how can I do this wickedness and sin against Mary!

The story of this raid might be paralleled by many a similar one amongst our own Indian tribes. The raiders ask this pretended priest to take counsel of God; which he pretends to do; and, of course, as false priests always do, he encourages them in their nefarious enterprise. They had

come to the house of Micah, stolen his gods and compelled his priest to go with them. And when Micah remonstrates, they threaten him: "*Let not thy voice be heard amongst us;—keep still;—lest angry fellows run upon thee, and thou lose thy life and the lives of thy household!*" (Chap. xviii., 25.) Most careful are they to have these images, and this false priest, with them; but the idea of having the living God with them, the God of judgment and law and righteousness, is far from their thoughts. Even so, it is, and has been, in all places and times.

The narrative then proceeds; *They took the things which Micah had made, (these images and their appurtenances), and the priest which he had; and came unto Laish, unto a people quiet and secure. And they smote them with the edge of the sword, and burnt the city with fire. And,—the narrative adds, with a touch of pathos,—there was no deliverer!* (v. 28.)

This wicked raid,—let it be borne in mind,—was some generations after the conquest of Canaan!

It may be asked, in what respect does this raid differ from the raid, on a far more extensive scale, which was made under the leadership of Joshua? Why was that raid right, and this raid wrong? For the two were apparently precisely similar.

Consideration, however, will reveal a vital difference. Thus,—

The invasion of Joshua was in pursuance of a Divine purpose of judgment and retribution; this raid arose simply from a lust for more territory. The tribe of Dan had a smaller territory allotted to them than any other tribe. They became discontented, ambitious, lustful of more land, and organized this murderous inroad upon a quiet and peaceable people in order to get it. There was no Divine command, and on their part only a pretence of seeking Divine counsel.

And it ended in their setting up a graven image in the territory of Dan, and their continuing this sham priesthood; anticipating the ways of Jeroboam, in after ages. Thus idolatry bore its natural fruit.

The next two chapters in this book of Judges contain a record of some of the darkest deeds that have disgraced

Jewish history,—or, indeed, the history of any people. Yet, withal, there are gleams of brightness that show that God was not utterly forgotten by the whole of them.

The story (but let us bear in mind that these are real occurrences; the air of verisimilitude in them is unmistakable), opens with the description of a Levite who took a concubine (or wife,—for the word will bear either meaning) out of Bethlehem, Judah. He himself lived on the side of Mount Ephraim. His wife proves unfaithful to him and returns home. He has still affection for her, goes to Bethlehem, abides some days with her father in great friendliness,—the woman is reconciled to her husband, and the two then take their journey northwards towards their home. They are overtaken by nightfall, and turn aside to pass the night at Gibeah, a town in the tribe of Benjamin.

This town appears to have been a veritable Sodom. For the deeds of that night are worse than those recorded in the history of Lot. A lustful and wicked crowd gathered about the house where the man and his concubine (or wife) had taken refuge, and the wretched woman was subjected to scandalous outrages,—at the hands of the mob.

Nearly dead with what had been done to her, during the night, she dragged herself to the door of the house at dawn of day, fell down at the threshold, and there remained while the people of the house woke up. The Levite and the man who had shown him hospitality seem to have been paralyzed with terror at the violence of the mob, for they made no attempt to rescue the woman. In fact, their lives were threatened if they interfered. But, in the morning, when the husband came to his wife, he was horror-struck to find her dead! (Chap. xix., 1, 28.)

Then a desperate purpose of revenge seized the man;—a dire and terrible vengeance he determined to take. Read verses 29 and 30;—and it will be seen that the deed he did was such as a man could only do when transported with grief and rage almost to the verge of insanity.

He took his wife's body home, and, instead of interring her in some family sepulchre,—he deliberately cut the body into twelve pieves, and sent a piece to each tribe; invoking vengeance on a deed the like of which *had not been seen or done from the day that the children of Israel came out of*

Egypt! (v. 29, 30.) *Consider of it,—he says,—take counsel, and speak your mind.*

Brief words and weighty. No need to say much. What could speak more loudly than the mangled body of this woman of Bethlehem!

The deed occasioned what we would call a tremendous excitement all over the land. A great company gathered as one man to Mizpeh. The Levite told his dreadful story;—and the conclusion was come to, there and then,—that not one of them should go to his tent or to his house, until judgment had been executed on the men of Belial at Gibeah for the wickedness wrought in Israel.

A demand was made of the tribe of Benjamin that they should be delivered up. But some strange spirit of perversity or tribal pride seized the heads of Benjamin, and they refused.

Then war broke out. Battle was joined. Vast numbers were slain on each side. The alternations of the war are described with a wonderful vividness in chapter xx. We can almost see the marching and counter-marching of the forces, and watch the swaying tide of battle as victory seems to incline first in one direction and then in another. But at last (v. 42), the men of Benjamin turned their backs before the men of Israel; and the battle overtook them:—They were enclosed round about, chased, *and trodden down with ease*, (v. 43), (a terrible expression, indicating the exhaustion of utterly wearied combatants), the numbers of the slain being altogether, of that one tribe of Benjamin, twenty-five thousand.

Thus, when the lust of man broke out, the fire raged fiercely and without reason in that period, when *there was no king in Israel, and every man did that which was right in his own eyes!* Behold how great a matter a little fire kindleth, says St. James. *The beginning of strife is as when one letteth out water*, says the wise Solomon; and those who are cognizant of the devastation caused, in our own day, by a very little leak in the dams that supply cities with water; the rising torrent, sweeping away homes, bridges, factories—and, even whole towns, or districts of towns; with the men, women and children, inhabiting them; may have a vivid idea how, in these Israelitish days, when there was no con-

trolling authority, the storm of war swept through the land over a matter, which, if lawful authority had prevailed, would have been settled by the bringing to justice of some twenty or thirty ruffians.

After this terrible devastation, there was a natural reaction.

The people came to the house of God. That is, to such representation of it as still survived. One of the Psalmists vividly describes how, *when he came to the house of God* he recovered the faith which had been almost overthrown by beholding how wicked men prosper. (Psalm lxxiii., 17.) Even so this people, probably coming to return thanks for victory, awoke to the consciousness of the awful calamity that had fallen upon the land. The tribe of Benjamin was almost annihilated. A violent revulsion set in. They lifted up their voices and wept sore, and said: "*O Lord God of Israel, why is this come to pass in Israel, that there should be one tribe lacking in Israel?*" And they rose early, built them an altar, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings.

But the spirit of violence and vengeance rose up again, just as the embers of a smouldering fire may burst out once more into fierce flame. The men of Jabesh-Gilead had not come to the assembly at Mispeh. A violent outburst of wrath was the result, and the congregation despatched an expedition against Jabesh-Gilead, smiting down the whole adult population, with the exception of the young women. These were brought back to the camp at Shiloh, and given for wives to a few of the Benjamites, who had fled to the fastnesses of rocky hills for refuge, and were now recalled.

Some time after this, an event is recorded that vividly recalls another of a similar character in Roman history, the rape of the Sabine women. There were still left a remnant of the tribe of Benjamin without wives. In consequence of the outrage at Gibeah, an oath had been taken by the tribes that none of them should give his daughter to wife to a Benjamite. They felt the obligation of the oath; a good trait, spite of the lawless times. But that the tribe of Benjamin should be built up again as speedily as possible,

permission was given to this remnant to attend the feast of the Lord at Shiloh; to lie in wait, to seize and carry off the daughters of Shiloh, when they came out in their dances, and to marry them in the land of Benjamin. This they did. They then returned to their inheritance, repaired the cities desolated by the war, and gradually built up the tribe again.

The last verse of the book of Judges, repeats again what had been said three times before, viz., that *in those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes!*

Not that there was no law; for they had the law given through Moses, which covered the whole ground of civil administration, as well as ecclesiastical. But there was, during long periods of time, no efficient machinery for enforcing the law; no king, no supreme ruler. Every man therefore was at liberty to do what he pleased; save only as he was coerced by one stronger than himself. The result was a practical commentary on the doctrine of unlimited freedom, viz., rampant lust, violence and murder, civil war, and the almost entire depopulation of one of the tribes of Israel.

And this, doubtless, had something to do with the demand that arose, not many years afterwards, for a permanent authority in the shape of a king.

THE BOOK

OF

RUTH.

RUTH, THE MOABITESS.

(Ruth, i. to end.)

This picturesque and beautiful narrative is of a woman highly honored in the old dispensation; for, though a foreigner, and one of that nation of Moabites who had done so much harm to Israel, she married into the family of an Israelite of Bethlehem, and became an ancestress of the Messiah. She is named in the genealogical line given in the first chapter in the New Testament;—being a grandmother to that Jesse, of Bethlehem who was father of David the King. Yet in religion Ruth was doubtless originally an idolater.

But in a critical time, when a choice had to be made between idolatry and the worship of the living God; between remaining amongst her kindred, who were heathen, and forsaking them, to cast in her lot with the people of God, this woman deliberately and most resolutely chose the latter. Her conduct is a striking type of what has been done again and again, in a spiritual sense; in these Christian times, viz.,—that forsaking of the world of godlessness and sin, that renouncing of its pomps and vanities, and that steadfast cleaving *with purpose of heart unto the Lord*, which is of the very essence of Christian discipleship. (Chap. i., 16.)

By stress of famine, evidently towards the close of the period of the Judges, a Bethlehemite named Elimelech, though owning his inheritance (it is important to notice this), was compelled to leave it by famine. He crossed the Jordan (only a few miles away) and passed on to the Moabitish country; where he settled down permanently, with his wife and two sons; not a wise proceeding in itself, for it led to a breach of one of the most strenuous of all the laws governing the conduct of Israelitish people. The sons married Moabitish women, and there was imminent

danger of the whole family relapsing into idolatry. For idolatry is always attractive, as the whole course of Old Testament history proves.

But a strange mortality came to the family. The eldest of it, Elimelech, died first; then the two sons, one after the other; all that remained of the family being now the three widows; for neither of the younger women had children. Most natural, then, it was, that the heart of the woman of Bethlehem, Naomi, (the name meaning *pleasant*), should turn back to her old home in the land of Judah; and equally natural was it for her to suggest to her daughters-in-law that they should abide amongst their own people.

Few things in all ancient story are more touching than the conference between this Jewish mother-in-law and her daughters, when she had concluded to return to her own land. But apart from the literary beauty of the narrative, is the picture of the resolute and abiding choice of one of the younger widows, a choice which is evidently not only one of strong natural affection (which it undoubtedly was), but of high devotion and consecration;—a forsaking of the idols of Moab, and a cleaving to the living God.

Naomi was accompanied by the younger woman, evidently in a condition of poverty, (*I went out full, she afterwards says, and the Lord hath brought me home again empty.*) When they had proceeded a certain distance, probably at some parting of the ways, in the valley of the Jordan, or at the ford where the river was crossed, Naomi stops, and desires to bid farewell to the young women, saying to them,—*Go, return each to her mother's house. The Lord deal kindly with you, as ye have dealt with the dead; and with me. The Lord grant you that ye may find rest, each in the house of her husband.*

Then she kissed them; and they lifted up their voice, and wept.

Can we wonder that both of them were now inclined to go forward on the journey, and cast in their lot with their mother-in-law, poor though she was. Both of them had evidently been dutiful and affectionate to their Jewish mother-in-law; and there had grown up a strong attachment between them.

Both of them, therefore, say they will accompany her to her own land. But, no; she thinks of them as young widows, childless; and with that longing for descendants that was so unusually strong in all Jewish women, (said to be, probably with truth, from a hope that the promised seed of blessing might spring from them), she reminds them how lonely and desolate was her lot, that they could have no husbands from her. Turn again, my daughters, she cries,—as one may think, with a passionate sobbing;—*nay my daughters; for it grieveth me much for your sakes that the hand of the Lord is gone out against me.*

Whose heart cannot but go out to this affectionate and tender-hearted woman as she pleads with these daughters-in-law, whom it is evident she loves tenderly, to return to their own kindred!

And can we wonder that both burst out again into a passion of weeping!

But now a line of division appears between them. The two women, Orpah and Ruth, both stand before Naomi, alike, at this moment, to all outward appearance. But very different thoughts were gradually arising in their hearts. On the part of Orpah,—a willingness to go back; on the part of Ruth, an inexorable determination not to go, but to cleave to her mother and to her mother's God, in life and death. For at this crisis, Orpah, kisses her mother and departs. But Ruth lingered still; and, on Naomi once more entreating her,—pointing to Orpah and saying,—*Behold, thy sister-in-law is gone back to her people and her gods;* she bursts out into a passionate exclamation, which, for tenderness and sublime devotion has hardly a parallel in all the story of human life:

"Entreat me not to leave thee," she says, (v. 16), *or to return from following after thee; for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge;—thy people shall be my people; and thy God shall be my God!*

Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried; the Lord do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me."

In all the records of passionate love, even between man and woman, as sung by poets of all lands and ages,—what is

there that stirs the heart more deeply than this outburst of affection from woman to woman !

But, as has been said, there is more than this; and it is for such a reason that this narrative has been preserved, under Divine guidance, as part of the sacred record for all time, viz., that it displays an unalterable determination to forsake the gods of Moab, and to cleave to the God of Israel. For let us mark what it was that Naomi said to Ruth when Orpah had left them,—“Behold, thy sister-in-law is gone back unto her people, *and unto her gods!*” The idolatry of Moab had an attraction for the one, but none for the other. Ruth would henceforth love and serve and honor the God of Israel. No worldly motive influenced her; for, as the narrative plainly shows, she went to a lot of poverty.

So they two went until they came to Bethlehem! But so changed was the appearance of the widow of the well-to-do husbandman, their former townsman Elimelech, that all the people said: *Is this Naomi?* And she said,—with sad memories of the pleasant past of her life gathering about her, her husband, her sons, her land as it was in former happy days, in the little city that still crowns the hill a few miles south of Jerusalem;—she said unto them,—*Call me not Naomi, call me Mara*, (the last word meaning bitterness, as we remember it in the narrative of the Departure from Egypt).

Call me *Mara*, cried this woman of a strong, passionate temperament,—*for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me! I went out full*—doubtless with both goods and money, (Elimelech having mortgaged his farm),—and having a husband and two well-grown sons, *and the Lord hath brought me home again empty; why then call me Naomi?* and bring back to memory these pleasant days of old.

How true is all this, to life and character! How true to men and women, too, in the chances and changes of life in our own day. Some rise from poverty to affluence. We see the son of the peasant become the man of wealth and power; performing service to his country and decorated with title and honor; his wife sharing in all.

And, even in these days of progress,—do we not see the

reverse,—the man of wealth stripped of all, sinking into poverty with his family, leaving the mansion of former days, for a humble dwelling in the obscure parts of a city,—dying, leaving no provision for widow and daughters, who become lost in the great crowd of the poor and needy, needing, and perhaps receiving, assistance from the very persons whom they once befriended in happier days. Ah!—if we could learn of all the tragedies of life that the poorer streets of great cities could reveal, or the stories that our “Refuges” and our “Homes” could tell, we should perhaps be less selfish, more charitable, more Christlike in our care for the needy,—more sympathizing with the many Naomi’s of the world around us, who once were full and now are empty, whose lot is indeed bitterness, and who would say, as this Jewish widow to her former neighbours,—Call me not Naomi, but call me Mara !*

Yet it is well to note that this Jewish woman was of a godly sort. When alone she accepted her lot as from the Lord. Like another sorely afflicted one of these ancient times, she said in her very heart,—*The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away.*

It was only when she was amongst former friends that human nature asserted itself and she cried out,—Call me Mara, and not Naomi. But when the first outburst of feeling was over, we find her taking her place naturally and quietly amongst the people of her city as a poor woman.

And this lot was quickly accepted by her daughter-in-law, for Ruth, as we find, goes out into the fields to glean, exactly as the poor do in our days. She has become only a gleaner, perhaps on the very fields of her late father-in-law.

*On the very day that the foregoing words were written, a letter was received by the author from a wealthy and prosperous friend of former days, now passed to his rest, but who was in such reduced circumstances that a small gift of money at Christmas time was gratefully accepted. A postscript to this letter reads as follows :—

“I need hardly say that situated as I am now, these holiday seasons are filled with past memories. Our home, my beloved wife, now at rest, children scattered, and my riches gone! My dear friend, it almost breaks my heart at times! But the dear Lord in thus leading me through sorrow to His own abiding rest and peace!”

Well indeed is it that such a letter can end with such a strain of faith and hope.

But this very acceptance of her condition of poverty brings about, in the order of Divine Providence, a marvelous change in her lot. For, in Bethlehem there lived a kinsman of Elimelech, now grown to be a wealthy and prosperous man. And to him, it appertained, according to the Moasic law, to have the right,—and, in fact, the duty, to redeem the inheritance of the family. This duty, (and the reason for it), is clearly explained in the Book of Leviticus. (Chap. xxv., 23 to 28.) It has already been seen with what extraordinary care the preservation of land in the same family, from generation to generation, was guarded in the law given through Moses. And with this, these good people of Bethlehem were well acquainted. (Chap. 2.) This wealthy kinsman, Boaz by name (a name still borne by Jewish families), was evidently a good man, apparently inclining towards middle age, as devout as he was rich, and making others good by his example. It is a beautiful picture that is given of the relation between this man and his servants; (v. 4) of his regard for them, and of their respect for him. "*Behold Boaz came from Bethlehem, and said unto the reapers, the Lord be with you. And they answered, The Lord bless thee,* all which might be the purest formality, and meaningless, except as indicating how the ordinary intercourse of those Jewish people was tinged with devout expressions. Yet, in all probability, these salutations were an index of godly feeling on both sides. For the whole conduct of the man is that of a courteous and most considerate master. He was, indeed, what we might call a true gentleman. He notices Ruth, who, in gleaning over the unfenced plain about Bethlehem, (still called the field of Boaz), came upon the land owned by him, (the very fields, let us note, where, in after ages, the shepherds watched their flocks by night, at which time the angel announced the birth of One descended from these very two persons.)

His kindness to her, his charge for her protection, his direction to let fall handfuls on purpose so that her gleaning may be a good one; his invitation to her to come and share the midday meal with himself and his reapers, are all a manifestation of beautiful courtesy and goodness. (It is important to note all this in view of what follows after.)

He learns of her having left her own people to cast in her lot with Naomi, and says, (v. 11), *It hath been fully shown me all that thou hast done. . . .*

The Lord recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings thou hast come to trust!

A good man, indeed, and a devout, in whom the love of God, and kindness to men, were equally conspicuous.

After all this, it is a real touch of human nature to find that the mother-in-law is thinking of a husband for the young Moabitess, now fully incorporated into the family of Israel, and whom, therefore, any Israelite could marry without transgressing the law.

"*My daughter*, Naomi says, *shall I not seek rest for thee, that it may be well with thee.* (Chap. iii.) To seek rest is a purely Hebrew mode of expression, and very beautiful and suggestive of what the marriage state is to a woman when entered upon in the fear of God, and with affection on both sides. We have already seen in what high regard the newly married were held under the law of Moses, when it was ordained that the husband should be free from military service or any onerous engagement for a whole year after the nuptials, that he might remain at home and comfort the wife he had taken. (Deut. xxiv., 5.) It is quite in the spirit of this ordinance that Naomi speaks of seeking *rest* for her daughter in marriage, and quite natural, too, that her thoughts should turn to Boaz as a possible husband.

But the directions she gives to Ruth to enter the threshing-floor during the hours in which Boaz was sleeping are so contrary to all our western ideas of delicacy—and even of decency,—that they have given much occasion to the unbeliever to blaspheme. Yet it is evident that what was done, was directed by a good woman, with perfect knowledge and consideration. These people knew perfectly well, far better than we do, what was seemly and what was unseemly, what was right and what was wrong, according to their circumstances, and habits, and the times they lived in; and nothing can be plainer in the whole narrative than what was directed and what was done was in perfect purity of thought and intention.

All of them were virtuous and godly people; and far indeed from their thoughts was anything that savoured of loose conduct. "*Thou followedst not young men, whether poor or rich;*" said Boaz to her; "*and all the city of my people doth know that thou art a virtuous woman.*"

This is the light in which the scripture narrative puts what was done; and certainly these narratives do not blind or hide the facts when the contrary is done.

Now, let it be noted, that in doing what she did she claimed that Boaz should perform the duty of a kinsman, which would mean the redemption of the inheritance of her father-in-law.

But he replied that there was a nearer kinsman than he;—*If he will perform unto thee the part of a kinsman, well; let him do the kinsman's part; but if he will not do the part of a kinsman unto thee then will I.* And thus the matter rested, Ruth leaving the tent as pure a woman as when she entered it.

The next kinsman on being appealed to, (Chap. iv.), agreed to redeem the inheritance, so far as Naomi was concerned. But on hearing that Ruth the Moabitess must also be dealt with as representing her deceased husband, he declines; lest, as he says, "*he may mar his own inheritance.*" (v. 5, 6.)

The conversation between the two men has a curious modern, business-like air; sounding much as a conversation would in these days respecting a proposed discharge of mortgage. *Ho,—such-a-one,—*says Boaz to his neighbour, on meeting him,—*turn aside, sit down here.*

Then certain elders were called to come and listen,—(there were always such about the gate of the city, which was the common centre of traffic and intercourse), and they came. Then Boaz says to the kinsman, after recounting the circumstance of Naomi's return, *I thought to advertise thee, —of her selling the land;—if thou wilt redeem it, redeem it,—but if thou wilt not redeem it, then tell me; for there is none to redeem it beside thee; and I am after thee.*

(It is a singular instance of the survival of terms and phrases through thousands of years, that the terms *redeem* and *redemption* are still used in precisely the same way,

with respect to mortgages on land, to this very day, amongst ourselves.)

But the matter of attestation is different. There are, and always have been, witnesses. These witnesses, with us, sometimes affix their signatures to a deed; which, in English custom is *indented*,—the deed reciting,—*this indenture witnesseth*: but more commonly, in certain parts of Canada, as in France, the whole is done before a notary, whose signature and seal are evidence in court.

But in the times of Boaz, the custom was, concerning redeeming and changing the ownership of land, that a man *plucked off his shoe*, and gave it to his neighbour as a testimony.

Thus, then, was this redemption of the inheritance accomplished, and ratified by witnesses. And at the same time, and in presence of the same witnesses, Boaz announced his intention to make Ruth his wife, following that injunction of the law which required the *next kinsman* of a deceased husband (Deut. xxv. 5), to take the widow to wife;—*that his name be not put out of Israel*.

The felicitations of the witnesses on this betrothal are very striking and beautiful: (v. 11) "*The Lord make the woman that is to come into thine house like Rachel and like Leah, which two did build the house of Israel; and do thou worthily in Ephratah and be famous in Bethlehem*."

A prayer which might have been a prophecy; for surely the descendants of this man and woman became famous, not only in Bethlehem, but through all the land of Israel and even throughout the world. For where in any land have there been names more famous than David and Solomon and Jehoshaphat, and Hezekiah, and many more of their illustrious house. But far beyond this, is the fame and the glory that came to this family long ages afterwards, for from it sprang the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of David, and the Saviour of the world.

So Boaz took Ruth, and she became his wife. . . and she bare a son; which son became the father of Jesse, and the grandfather of David.

And the women said unto Naomi, *Blessed be the Lord, which hath not left thee this day without a kinsman, that*

his name may be great in Israel. And he shall be to thee a restorer of life, and a nourisher of thine old age, for the daughter-in-law, which loveth thee, which is better to thee than seven sons, hath borne him.

Thus did this good woman Ruth reap a reward for her choice, and her steadfast affection. It was according to the general course of Divine Providence in those days as promised through Mosea, that blessings should attend those who clave to the God of Israel. And this was strikingly fulfilled in the case of Ruth, who choosing a lot of poverty, rather than to turn back to the idols of her fathers, was raised to a position of comfort and prosperity by marriage, and honored to be the ancestress of a line more distinguished in the spiritual sphere than any the world has ever seen.

THE FIRST BOOK
OF
SAMUEL.

PRELIMINARY REMARKS.

The opening sentence of the fifteenth chapter of this study of the Book of Samuel refers to the interest of the lives of the remarkable characters of Scripture from a literary point of view. But, in truth, this is the very smallest consideration regarding them. Never should it be forgotten (although it sometimes is) that the story of these lives is written for our learning;—not for our recreation, or, for mere information. Their literary quality is nothing, in comparison with this great purpose. The spiritual instruction and education of mankind is the one object had in mind by the Divine Spirit who spoke through the medium of these Old Testament writings. Beyond doubt, from a human point of view, the literary quality of the records is often poor, bearing marks of haste and want of revision, almost as if written by an uneducated man. It is a question if this was not, in some cases, purposely ordered, even as was the case with the Apostle Paul in after ages, who declares, in writing to the Corinthian christians, that he deliberately, and of set purpose avoided an eloquent and polished style of address in order that they might not have their attention distracted by eloquent periods from the great subjects on which he was addressing them. He preached of *Righteousness, and Temperance, and Judgment to come*; of the loss of the soul, and the way of its salvation. What, in comparison of these great realities, were polished periods, a fine style, a classical mode? That he could, if he chose, speak in a classical and polished style, is plain from his address at Athens. That he deliberately avoided it at Corinth he tells us himself.*

*But it is very significant, and has often been noted, that whereas in Corinth he had abundant fruit of his labors, in Athens there seems to have been scarcely any result. Though, as we read in Chap. XVII. of the Acts of the Apostles, "*certain men clave unto him and believed,*" amongst whom was one of the judges of the Areopagus, no church was formed at Athens in the days of the Apostles.

Now, in some of the biographies and narratives of the Old Testament there is such an absolute want of literary style and finish, they are so rough, so disconnected, and so wanting in chronological order, that one cannot but conclude that there must have been a wise and Divine purpose that so it should be. And the purpose would seem to be to compel the reader's attention to the *matter*, and prevent any lingering on the *manner*. When the shell is very beautiful, men may neglect the kernel. Yet, it is in the kernel there is food, there is that which sustains life, and will save from starvation. In comparison with these what is a beautiful shell. Now, in these portions of Scripture which are rough and disconnected, there is always a kernel; always spiritual teaching; always that which is *profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness*. (II Tim. iii.) And, fixing the mind on these, and appreciating their supreme importance—as in all reason they are bound to do, men will have no inclination to spend time in thinking of the literary quality of the writing, whether that quality is good or bad.

These remarks apply particularly to these narratives of the time of Samuel. Some of them are very disjointed, sketchy, unfinished, and wanting in chronological order. They are rather like the rough jottings made by a busy man of affairs than the work of a man of literary leisure. But this is what might be expected. The writers of these chronicles, though they wrote under Divine direction, were not literary men, as we moderns understand literary men, but men full of the affairs and burdens of life. Sometimes, probably, when less pressed than usual, they were able to write more or less of well-finished narratives, such, for example, as that of the fight with Goliath. At other times they simply jotted down rough notes of incidents, or recollections of events, leaving them as they were written. Nearly the whole of the latter half of the First Book of Samuel is of this character. And it is evident that any future commentator or transcriber did not touch, or attempt to amend, the substance of the record. They evidently left them as they were. Otherwise they certainly would have put them into better literary form, and more regular chronological order.

But let us ever bear in mind that in matters of such transcendant importance as are treated of in Scripture, literary form is *nothing*. It may be present, or it may be absent. It matters not. It is as chaff to the wheat. But the substance is *always* there. And the guidance of the Holy Spirit was manifest in securing that the substance *should* be there; viz., that the narrative should be instructive, quickening, profitable; and that when searched and meditated upon it would always yield what would be for life and salvation. And this it certainly is.

CHAPTER I.

THE BIRTH AND DEDICATION OF SAMUEL.

(I. Samuel, i.)

As Samuel was the last of the long line of Judges, so-called, (but they would be called in these days governors, or presidents, seeing that their office was to rule), it would have been reasonable to suppose that his life and works would be found in the Book of Judges. The reason why it was not, may probably be found in the fact that this last of the race was different from, and superior to the rest in several important particulars. For he was more than a Judge, or Ruler in the secular sphere; he was a *Prophet*, and acknowledged as such by all Israel. And though only of the order of Levites by birth, he certainly exercised the higher functions of the priesthood. For after the death of the High Priest, Eli, whose sons came to so ignominious an end, he seems to have exercised the office of High Priest, though he was never called by that name. Thus, without interpreting any fanciful interpretation upon the Divine word, we may see in this eminent man (as, indeed, we may see in others of the Old Testament), a type of Him, the Son of man and Son of God,—who was, in His own person, the Prophet, Priest, and King of the new dispensation. Thus is this man, Samuel, elevated, not only above the military judges or rulers who preceeded him, but above most of the kings who followed after him, with the conspicuous exception of that Son of Jesse who was at once a great ruler, a great captain, and a great interpreter of Divine thoughts and purposes to future ages.*

*It will be seen by this sentence, and still further later on, that the author regards the larger part of the Psalms as actually the work of the great Jewish king. And he does this in spite of the theories of some modern critics, for such theories, when weighed in the balance, will often be found wanting in those qualities of sound judgment, common sense and knowledge of men, which are

The last Judge who preceded Samuel was Samson; whose birth had the same marks of Divine intervention as was the case in the birth of Samuel. And Samson, like Samuel, was a Nazarite from his birth. But there could scarcely be a greater contrast than in the after life and destiny of the two men. Want of strict parental control (Judges xiv.), early developed an amount of self-willed indulgence in Samson that led him utterly astray from the law of God; and spoiled the great purpose to which his life should have been consecrated. In the case of Samuel, he himself, even when young, had before him a terrible example of the consequences of parental weakness, in the case of the High Priest and his sons; "*Sons of Belial*," as they became, and abandoned in wickedness,—while his life, was one of perfect consecration; consistent, true to his calling as a priest and a prophet, unswerving in integrity, and regard to the interests of the people; so that at the last he could call all Israel to witness whether he had not served them honorably and faithfully: (chap. xii.), and the people heartily responding, *God is witness*.

The family from which Samuel sprang was originally of Bethlehem, that famous little town from whence also came David, and also David's son and Lord. But at the time of the opening of the narrative we find the family settled farther to the north, viz., in the tribe of Ephraim. His father, the Levite, Elkanah, had two wives; an arrangement permitted by the law of Moses, but discouraged, as has been shown (Exod. xxi., 10), and with good reason, for jealousy and family jars were the natural fruit of it. And, as it was with Hagar and Sarah in the time of Abraham, so it was now with the two wives of Elkanah. One of them, Hannah, though the best beloved, and evidently worthy of the husband's love from a high excellence of character,—had no children; the other, a woman of a much inferior character, had both sons and daughters. Of inferior character, as is evident, for she taunted and provoked Hannah; became her adversary, and

necessary to arrive at true conclusions. And that a critic, even though he knows half a dozen languages, may be singularly deficient in these, is evident from the writings of many of the modern school.

fretted her, because she had no children; her dislike and enmity being evidently inflamed by noticing how much more beloved Hannah was than she. (v. 5, 6.)

A very hard lot for this good Hebrew woman; and indeed nothing could be harder; because of the hope that lay deep down in every Hebrew woman's breast that she might become the mother of the promised seed in whom the nations of the earth should be blessed. At that early time the word of prophecy was not so definite as it afterwards became. The seed was to be of Abraham, then of Isaac, then, more definitely, of Jacob. But since Jacob's time nothing definite had been revealed as to the tribe, or family, or the place of birth, or the time when;—so that any woman of Israel at the time of the Judges might entertain the hope. As it is even now with regard to the Second Coming, so it was then of the first, the event is certain, but the time is not revealed.

Hannah, therefore, a devout woman, doubtless shared in this longing to be the favored mother, and probably showed it. And the reproaches of her adversary (note the word adversary as applied to the other wife) were thus all the harder to bear; reproaches which were the offspring of pride and vain-glory, as reproaches are in these days, when women, and men, too, boast themselves, at another's expense, and tease and torment them in spite and malice.

This provocation was especially keen when the husband went up to fulfil his course as a Levite in the Tabernacle at Shiloh, his two wives accompanying him. Why it should be so at such a time, is not easy to understand, unless we refer it to the general perversity of human nature. But it proves, plainly enough, what has been proved in a thousand instances in modern times, that a person may pay scrupulous attention to religious ordinances and yet be grievously deficient in the practice of ordinary virtues. The first chapter of the Prophecy of Isaiah bears very emphatically on this point.

The kindness and love of her husband, under this trial, are very noticeable. He said to her:—

"Hannah, why weepest thou? And why eatest thou not? And why is thy heart grieved? Am I not better to thee than ten sons?"

But a very sad episode occurs during this time of distress, which, like so many of the sore trials of life, was overruled to an end far beyond what she could have dreamed of. And the episode itself is very instructive to those who are in official positions in the Church of God, as showing the danger of hasty and harsh judgments.

For, as she worshipped in the Tabernacle, and prayed, silently, *in bitterness of soul, and wept, and vowed a vow to the Lord that if a son were born to her she would give him to the Lord all the days of his life,—Eli, the aged High Priest, noticed her. He marked her mouth.* Her lips moved, but no sound escaped her. And it was a sign of the general corruption of the time that he instantly came to the conclusion that she was drunken;—for, unless it were a somewhat usual occurrence for women, at that time, about the Tabernacle to be in that condition, such a thought would scarcely have occurred to him. But the second chapter of the book throws a lurid light upon this matter.

Reproving her, under this mistaken judgment, he heard,—very likely with astonishment,—words from her lips which proved how grievously he had wronged this good woman.

No, my lord, she says, I am a woman of a sorrowful spirit; I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink; but have poured out my soul before the Lord! Count not thine handmaid for a daughter of Belial; for out of the abundance of my complaint and grief have I spoken hitherto!

These touching words, utterly impossible to have been spoken by one of the “daughters of Belial” who, alas! were sometimes to be seen in the neighborhood of the Tabernacle, at once went to the heart of the good priest. He acknowledged his wrong in a moment, and pronounced upon Hannah the priestly blessing, “*Go in peace,*” a form of benediction that we find in use in our Saviour’s time, and that has survived to our own day in the formula *Pax vobiscum!*

But Eli did more. He added his prayer to hers,—that the petition she desired might be granted. So then, with the thankful words “*Let thine handmaid find grace in thy sight,*” she went her way with a cheerful heart.

The prayer of Hannah was heard, and a son was born, to

whom she gave the appropriate name, "*Asked of God*," which is the meaning of the Hebrew word Samuel.

And she faithfully kept her promise of dedication; a hard promise, indeed, to fulfil,—to part with her only child while only a child, as hard for her, probably, as it is in these days for mothers to give up their sons for service in the mission field, for Christ's sake. But God gave Hannah strength, as he gives grace now according to the day and the duty.

She said, I will not go to the Tabernacle until the child be weaned; *and then will I bring him, that he may appear before the Lord, and there abide for ever!*

What the devout Psalmist longed for, as regarded himself, "*that he might dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of his life*,"—(Psalm xxvii.), that, this holy woman desired for her son: and she was willing to part with him that this great end might be fulfilled. And many a devout soul in these days echoes the aspiration, for himself, only lifting up the idea to a higher plane, and fixing the heart, not upon any earthly Tabernacle, but upon that *Father's house of many mansions*, where the pure and the redeemed of all ages and climes shall meet, and sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb: (Rev. xv., 3.) where God's servants serve him, (Rev. xxii.) in that heavenly sphere wherein there is no Temple, but the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it; from which they go no more out, but like the child Samuel in the Tabernacle, *there abide for ever!*

The husband, a good man doubtless, felt the parting also, but he met the trial with the utterance of faith and submission, "*Do what seemeth thee good,—only the Lord establish His word!*" Yes, the Lord establish His word;—a great thought; an abiding thought, equivalent to that word, THY WILL BE DONE, which is the common utterance of all faithful souls throughout the Christian world to-day. Thus do we join hearts with these, the faithful ones of three thousand years ago.

And when the act of renunciation and consecration was complete, by the presentation of the child to the priest; a

mighty rush of holy exaltation filled the woman's heart. It was not dejection, not sorrow for her loss, but a great rejoicing that swept through her soul (and it has often been so since in the same circumstances), the Spirit of God enabling her to pour out her feelings in a wonderful song of thanksgiving and aspiration, worthy to take place with any utterance of Psalmist or Prophet in after ages. Thus she cries out,

*"My heart rejoiceth in the Lord!
My mouth is enlarged over mine enemies;
Mine horn is exalted in the Lord!
Because I rejoice in thy salvation;*

Then from her own condition, she lifts up her soul to the Divine Majesty;

*There is none holy as the Lord,
For there is none beside Thee;
Neither is there any rock like our God.*

*Talk no more so exceedingly proudly,
Let not arrogancy come out of your mouth;
For the Lord is a God of knowledge,
And by Him actions are weighed.*

Thence she passes on in a highly poetical strain, thinking of her humiliations, her weary waiting, the provocations of her adversary; and, perhaps—of the adversary's sons and daughters; possibly also the sneers and scorn of the dissolute sons of the priest and, then, finally of her own great deliverance;—

*The bows of the mighty men are broken,
And they that stumbled are girded with strength,
They that were full have hired them selves out for bread,
And they that were hungry ceased.
So that the barren hath borne seven,
And she that hath many children hath waxed feeble.*

Then, rising again, as a bird on the wing, after stooping in her flight, she apostrophises the power, the majesty, the mercy, the graciousness of the Supreme; in the sublime words:—

*The Lord killeth, and maketh alive;
He bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up;
He raiseth up the poor out of the dust;
And lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill;*

*To set them among princes;
And to make them inherit the throne of glory;
For the pillars of the earth are the Lord's;
And He hath set the world upon them.*

Then, in another strain still :—

*He will keep the feet of his Saints;
And the wicked shall be silent in darkness;
For by strength shall no man prevail;
The adversaries of the Lord shall be broken to pieces;
Out of heaven shall he thunder upon them;*

*The Lord shall judge the ends of the earth;
And He shall give strength unto his King;
And exalt the horn of His anointed!*

A noble ode, indeed, and clearly of the Spirit of God. For whatever of natural poetic temperament might have appertained to this devout woman, the sweep of thought is too high, and the prophetic forecast too marked, for this ode to have been her unassisted production. There is a mark, a stamp, so to speak,—a characteristic, of all the inspired utterances, both of the Old Testament and the New, which is peculiar, and which all who have been familiar with the Scriptures can recognize, even as a practised expert in a financial office can tell a genuine note or coin, the moment he handles it. This peculiar mark it is which at once separates the writings of the Apocrypha from those of the prophets and historians of the Old Testament;—and which, in fact, distinguishes the whole of the Sacred Writings from all other books, whether secular or sacred. No matter how great the genius of the inspired writer; let him be a Plato in his wonderful 'Republic,' an Augustine sighing after the 'City of God,' a Homer, a Dante, or a Milton, with their wonderful visions of sacred things,—there is a difference, not of degree, but of *kind*, between these and the writings of the Apostles and Prophets, through whom, as it is declared, the Living God, in divers manners, spake to men. And this ode of Hannah had this unmistakable mark. She spake as she was moved by the Holy Ghost; and gave utterance to great and eternal truths,—truths for all time, as to the character, purposes, and government of

Almighty God; and the relations of mortal men to Him; and His to them.

When she speaks of the Supreme as *weighing* the actions of men, how perfect is the idea of the just Judge; and how we are reminded of that hand writing on the wall of the palace of Belshazzar, *Thou art weighed in the balances and found wanting!*

When she rapidly portrays the chances and changes in the life of men, how instinctively we feel that the portraiture is true even to our own knowledge at this far distant day. When she declares that God *keepeth the feet of his Saints*; we can see the identity of the Divine procedure in the two dispensations, that in each there were those who were God's faithful ones amidst surrounding evil, who were "kept by His power through faith unto salvation" (I. Peter i). When she declares that *the Lord shall judge the ends of the earth*, how does she anticipate the revelations of psalmists (Psalm L., 4), or prophets (Daniel vii., 10), or of the Great Teacher Himself (Matt. xxv, 31). And when, finally, she prefigures God as giving *strength to his King*, and *exalting the horn of His anointed*; do we not see the foreshadowing of the coming king, the son of Jesse, who was so soon afterwards to be born in Bethlehem, to be anointed by Samuel, to subdue Israel's enemies, and to be exalted above all round about him. Nay, is there not here, as in so many places in the Old Testament, not only a prophecy of the earthly king, but of that Divine King, the Son and Lord of David, the anointed of God, the Christ of our adoration, who is going on conquering and to conquer, who shall subdue all enemies under his feet and to whom is given a kingdom and a dominion, that shall never pass away.*

*The mention of *King* and *anointed* in this noble lyric is one of those expressions which critics are apt to fasten upon as discrediting the authorship of certain psalms and prophecies. How could this woman, says the critic, speak of a *King*, and an *anointed* one, when no such personage had ever been known in Israel up to her time. The poem, therefore, must have been composed after the time of David, and put into the mouth of Hannah by the narrator, in order, perhaps, to glorify Samuel, her son. There would be some foundation for this criticism, if this lyric were not evidently of that peculiar order which stamps it as uttered by Divine in-

spiration, which being so, it was perfectly natural that some portion of it should be anticipatory and prophetic, looking forward to a time not then present.

This consideration applies to a large portion of what is called, very foolishly, the *Higher* criticism, which is nearly all founded, whether the author says so or not, on the assumption—a baseless assumption indeed—that there can be no such thing as the foretelling of future events, and no such events as miracles. Carried to its natural conclusion, this theory inevitably leads to the theory that there is no such being as God.

CRITICAL NOTES TO CHAPTER I.

(1) AS TO THE UNION OF SACRED AND SECULAR OFFICES.

Although the union of secular and sacred functions in one person is disappearing in the evolution of events in these later times, it is interesting to note how the idea has manifested itself in modern history, especially in monarchical countries. One need but recall the *prince-bishops* of mediæval times who could go out with their retainers to war; also the prelates of the Church, who were also *Lord High Chancellors of England*; together with cardinals like RICHELIEU, who in their day directed the policy of the greatest state of Europe. But the most conspicuous example is that of the spiritual head and chief bishop of the Roman church, who was for ages a temporal prince, one amongst the sovereigns of Europe, with territories over which he ruled as monarch; having soldiers under his command, arms at his disposal, guards about his palace and person (this survives even yet); and who, though now deprived of most of these attributes of earthly sovereignty, has never ceased to claim them, and does now, as his right. And all this in spite of the declaration of Jesus Christ, that His kingdom is not of this world, and that if *His kingdom were of this world, then would his servants fight for His defence* (John xviii., 36).

In all the foregoing cases, the persons named exercised spiritual functions also. The headship of the Church as exercised by the King of England and the Czar of Russia, is doubtless a survival of the same idea. But then there is no exercise of spiritual functions in either case, as there was, and is, with the head of the Church of Rome.

It is a very singular circumstance that during the whole period of the Judges,—a period of several hundred years—there is scarcely any mention of a High Priest, or of the Festivals, or of the observance of the Day of Atonement, or of the services of the Tabernacle. The whole religious system as instituted under Moses seems to have fallen into disuse almost as soon as the land of Canaan had been conquered. In the Book of Joshua (Chap. xviii., 1) we read that the Tabernacle was set up at Shiloh. But Shiloh is never mentioned again until we come to this narrative of the birth of Samuel. Towards the close of the period of the Judges, in a time of terrible intestine broils and disturbance, we read of the tribes assembling unto the Lord at Mizpeh (Judges xx.), not at Shiloh; and again, that they went up and came to the house of God, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings; and enquired of the Lord (for the ark of the covenant of God was there in those days—v. 26, 27). And

at this time there was a Priest of whom to ask counsel, a descendant of Aaron. But this is the only mention of anything of the kind in the whole book. There was evidently, during the whole period of the Judges, a condition of unsettlement and irregularity as to sacrifices, and observances, and tabernacle worship, though it must not be concluded from the silence of the Scripture narrative that it was wholly suspended. For it is one of the characteristics of Scripture narrative to omit much, that we know—from other parts of Scripture—to have transpired. This is a point never to be forgotten by thoughtful readers.

FURTHER CRITICAL NOTE TO CHAP. I.

AS TO THE SONG OF HANNAH.

How strikingly, in all spiritual things, the ideas of the Old Testament correspond to the New. The system of worship, and the outward forms of religious observance are wholly different. But the underlying truths are the same, though they exist in a more perfectly developed condition in the New than in the Old. For Christ came not to destroy the law, but to fulfil. Thus, in the song of Hannah, the following great truths of the new dispensation are clearly apparent:—

1. The glory of God as the supreme end.
2. The *salvation* of man.
3. The subjugation of the high-minded, and the exaltation of the poor and meek.
4. Divine judgment, here and hereafter.
5. Divine Providence and care for the whole world.
6. The keeping of saints.
7. The final triumph of righteousness in the exaltation of the Anointed King.

Thus the prophets of old spake more wisely than they knew (1. Peter i., 10, 11, 12), for they spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.

CHAPTER II.

THE WICKEDNESS OF THE SONS OF THE HIGH PRIEST.—THE POWERLESSNESS OF CEREMONIAL OBSERVANCES IN THEMSELVES.

(I. Samuel ii.)

There can scarcely be conceived a more perfect contrast than is presented in these ancient chronicles between the beautiful saintliness of some of the characters, and the violence and licentiousness of others, and that, in the same age, in the same country, and amongst the same class of the community. And it is one of the striking proofs that these narratives are not simply human compilations, that the evil is narrated with as much particularity and impartiality as the good. Let us remember that the foundation of the national life of this people was in theory, a separation from the evil of the life around them. They were to be a *peculiar treasure* to the perfectly pure and holy Supreme Lord; a *kingdom of priests* and a *holy nation*; (Exod. xix.). Now, a patriotic chronicler of these times (and the Jews, whatever their faults, were always intensely patriotic), would most naturally be inclined so to deal with stories of vice and crime amongst his people that there would not be such a flagrant contradiction between the theory and the practice. That this is the tendency of biographers and historians is undeniable.

But here, in these books of Scripture, we have related with terrible particularity deeds of violence and lust on the part of whole tribes of this people that would have disgraced the lowest savages that ever cursed the earth. What scandalous records of violence and revenge are the last chapters of the Book of Judges ! Did we not know it, we could never dream that this is a true story of the deeds of a people, who, of all the people of the earth, were in possession of a revelation of the Divine will, and of a system of law and religion, and even

literature, far beyond anything then existing in the world. But it is all only too plainly told. Here is the record; nothing hid, or glossed, or attempted to be explained, unless it is by the statement that in those days *there was no king in Israel!*

But the mere absence of a king, or supreme magistrate, would not account for such developments of wickedness, on the part of a people who had inherited such a perfect system of moral and religious administration, and had thus a rule and system in which such supreme importance was attached to family life, family rule, and family instruction. The legal system given through Moses, if properly carried out, needed no king to bind the state together. Each family, each village, each tribe, was a self-governing body, competent to administer law and preserve order within its own bounds. It was not because there was no king that there were such outbreaks of cruelty and crime, but from the inherent tendencies of human nature, and that in spite of perfect laws and ordinances.

For, as it is now, so it was then. Law, in itself, is not a moral power. Indeed, as we have it most philosophically opened up in the Epistle to the Romans, law, as a system of prohibition, often works,—so perverse is human nature—to provoke the very things that are prohibited. This is true of the experience of mankind even now.

Yet, along with these developments of violence and lust, we have exquisite pictures of devotion and goodness from amongst the same people, at the same time. The father and mother of Samson, for example, were just such pure and simple minded saints as are found in quiet out-of-the-way places in our own country now;

*Little and unknown,
Loved and prized by God alone.*

The same Book of Judges that records the lawless violence of the Danites (Judges xviii.) and the brutal wickedness of the men of Gibeah (Judges xix.), tells also of the faith of Gideon, the devotion of the daughter of Jephthah, and the high and noble patriotism of the prophetess Deborah.

The child Samuel being left by his mother in charge of the High Priest, and being now old enough to assist in the work of the Tabernacle (v. 11), though evidently a young child still, the narrative is transferred to the Tabernacle itself, and to what was customarily going on there. Certainly the story is one of strange contrasts. Eli, the High Priest, is set before us as an old and good man; a man who fulfilled his office well; an ardent lover of his country; kind and tender-hearted to a fault. To a fault; and the fault was fatal, for it resulted in over-indulgence to his family. His two sons, one of whom bore the time-honored name of Phinehas, were young men of strong character; self-willed, energetic, fearless; qualities, which, under proper guidance and early restraint, might have made them leaders of the people, in all right ways. Many a boy of headstrong and wilful character, 'difficult to deal with' either in school or family, has developed, under firm discipline into a manly and useful character, his strong will and fearless disposition, shaping out in course of time into the energetic man of business, the firm statesman, the daring engineer, the successful captain by land or sea. And if the grace of God is added to the strong discipline, then the wild and wilful boy may become the fearless missionary, the persevering explorer, the man not afraid to venture amongst thousands of savages, carrying his life in his hand, for their enlightenment and salvation.

NOTE.—Such contrasts as these utterly destroy any foundation for a theory of evolution as applied to human conduct in particular times or communities. But in truth, so does all history, and all extended biography, for these are records of the great forces of the human will, modified and influenced in some cases by the grace of God accepted and yielded to, and in others by bad example and evil communications, leading to lives of wrong-doing. Yet both developments may be found at the same time, in the same community, and often in the same family.

If every age, as may be alleged, produces typical characters and results, then it may be fairly asked which of the foregoing are to be taken as representative of the time we are considering, the good or the evil, the quiet and devout Elkanah or the violent and lustful sons of Eli?

No. The grand mistake of all who teach that human affairs are the product of times and circumstances is that they leave out the operation of the mightiest force of all, viz., the government and Providence of Almighty God.

But let a boy of that character be allowed to grow up to manhood with no restraint, or such feeble restraint that he laughs at it,—woe be to him, and to those about him. For he will invariably be a man of lust and violence,—indulging his passions without scruple, trampling on the rights of men, and staining the honor of women. And this is a true picture of the sons of the good High Priest, Eli. They were young men. It was evident that they had never had such restraint as their temperament called for. For we read that when reports of their violence and licentiousness reached the ears of Eli, instead of suspending them from their office, as he had the power to do, he merely uttered a mild rebuke, "*Nay, my sons! It is no good report that I hear. Why do ye such things? Ye make the Lord's people to transgress. If one man sin against another, the judge shall judge him, but if a man sin against the Lord, who shall intreat for him?*"

A feeble remonstrance, indeed, considering that Eli was in the place of authority; for Eli was Judge as well as High Priest. (chap. iv., 18.). He therefore had the power to stop the lawless proceedings of his sons. But he "*restrained them not,*" as we read in the next chapter. He did not put forth the power he had. For he could undoubtedly have banished them from the precincts of the Tabernacle, as High Priest, and he could have punished them as a magistrate for their violence in dealing with the meat for sacrifice; and he could have driven away the troops of loose women who gathered round the Tabernacle at the time of the Festivals. But he did none of these things, and the young men had, after a time, got far beyond being influenced by mere remonstrance. It is, too, evident that they had never been subjected to proper discipline when young, and, as is usually the case, they had now outgrown parental discipline altogether. And their father, neglecting to exercise his functions, either as High Priest or Magistrate, such scandals grew up about the Tabernacle that men came to *abhor* (v. 17) the times of sacrifice and festivals. The services of God's holy Tabernacle became, in fact, more like the licentious worship of Baal, than the sacrifices becoming a holy nation. How could fathers of families take their sons to a place of such corrupt associations!

The manner in which these young priests disregarded the injunction of the Mosaic code so as to secure more of the offering than the Priest was entitled to, is characteristic, and especially the answer they would make to one who objected, "*Nay, but thou shalt give it me now, and if not I will take it by force!*" Thus it was that they made themselves fat with the chiefest of all the offerings of Israel! (v. 29).

And the assembling of troops of godless women about the Tabernacle at that time throws a lurid light on the moral condition of numbers of the people of those days. These were the iniquities of the temples of Baal, in former times in the land, and these the *abominations* for which the Canaanites were driven out. Yet the corrupt tendencies of human nature survived, and cropped up again, and indeed were continually cropping up as we may see plainly enough by the writings of the prophets. But would not the holy services of the Tabernacle, and the sanctity of the priest's office restrain men and women from such evils? They should have done, doubtless. But all experience, both ancient and modern, shows that the mere ceremonial offices of religion carry with them no moral power. Men may attend with careful particularity to every ceremony, omitting nothing, and performing everything, while their moral sense is dead, and their conduct steeped in vice. It has been so even in Christian times. Even in those forms of Christian society whose very foundation was holiness and separation from the world, in the communities of men and women who have renounced society, to devote themselves to prayer and religious service in monasteries and abbeys, even amongst these, corruptions and scandals have prevailed, like those of Hophni and Phinehas. This was one of the most striking developments of medieval times. The writings of Erasmus prove this only too plainly. When the monasteries and religious houses of England were dissolved at the time of the Reformation, the people knew only too well the corruptions that had led up to the dissolution, and were satisfied with it. Otherwise the dissolution could never have been peaceably carried out. And it is noticeable that such corruptions in connection with religion, have prevailed almost exclusively in those communities where a high degree of ceremonial

observance has been the rule. It is certain that they have been comparatively rare amongst those whose form of worship comprised little ceremony and form, but consisted almost wholly of prayer (offered without form), reading of Scriptures and preaching. Not that ceremony, and religious separation, produce these evils. No. These evils spring from the corruption of the human heart, often acted upon by the power of example. But what is true is this,—that outward ceremony, form, and separation have no restraining power. With them, the corrupt tendencies of human nature develop themselves unchecked. On the other hand, the bringing of Divine truths before the minds of men, in prayer, preaching and reading, has a distinct spiritual power (Hebrews iv., 12), a power of restraint, a power of conversion, a power of salvation. (Romans i., 16.)

Hence, ceremony in religion needs to be carefully guarded, lest, instead of being a handmaid to spiritual worship, conducing to the *doing of all things decently and in order*, (I. Cor. xiv., 40.), it becomes an end in itself. Then the spiritual power of the assembly, of the church at large, diminishes, and in time vanishes away; while the evils generated by ungodliness become rampant. The picture of the Jewish church in the first chapter of the prophecies of Isaiah is one that has been repeatedly realized in Christian times.

At length, there came to the aged Priest a strong remonstrance direct from the God he served. "*A man of God,*" we read, came to Eli, and spoke in the name of the Lord. Who he was, what was his name and dwelling, what credentials he had to show for his mission, we are not told. But the message is certainly the message of a faithful man; the word is the word of a man of God, befitting the solemnity of the occasion, and in harmony with the Divine counsels. In fact, it bears the stamp of a Divine utterance. Reminding Eli (v. 27 et al), how the house of his fathers had been Divinely chosen and set apart for the high office of the priesthood, with a becoming sustenance from the people, Eli is asked pointedly, "*Wherefore kick ye at my sacrifice and honorest thy sons above Me, to enrich yourselves with the chiefest of the offerings of Israel my people !*" (v. 29.)

A terrible indictment this: *To honor thy sons above Me!* To allow such wicked men to minister at my altar because they were thy sons! Alas! for the wretched priest and father when this terrible light from above is thrown upon his conduct. And one can almost sympathise with his wretchedness as the words of condemnation and doom were pronounced.

"Once," said the Divine message, "*I said indeed that thy house should walk before me for ever. But now the Lord saith, Be it far from me! FOR THEM THAT HONOR ME, I WILL HONOR, AND THEY THAT DESPISE ME SHALL BE LIGHTLY ESTEEMED!*" *

Then follows the sentence of condemnation; opening up to the old man a sad future for his house and family;—which is to be cut off, so that there *shall not be an old man in thine house.* That Tabernacle, so shamefully desecrated, is to fall into the power of the enemies of Israel. If *any* of his children or descendants survive, they shall be a *son* of bitterness and sorrow; and all *shall die in the j. their age.* And for a sign that all this should be fulfilled. *He two wicked sons, Hophni and Phinehas, should die in one day, both of them!* Alas for the father who hears all this! Surely he might say, like his great ancestor, Jacob, I will go down to the grave mourning. (Gen. xxxvii., 35.)

But there is even a still more bitter drop in the cup. A faithful priest shall be raised up, says this man of God, who shall do the will of God, whose house shall be built up. And the men left of Eli's house shall come to this priest, *crouching to him for a piece of silver and a morsel of bread!* and saying, *Put me, I pray thee, somewhere about the priests' offices, that I may eat a piece of bread!*

What a dreadful fall,—what degradation, what a punishment for dishonoring God, and honoring his sons above the Divine Majesty!

NOTE.—A great principle of Divine government is here, and perfectly consistent with a dispensation of mercy and grace in Christian days. For though God shows *mercy* to the returning sinner, no matter how far he may have wandered, He does not *honor* any man until he has shown himself worthy of it by deeds of usefulness. And the honor, generally, is not the honor and applause of this world, vain and fleeting as such honor is, but the satisfying honor that arises from still enlarging usefulness, from the approval of conscience and the esteem of good men.

It is a terrible message, and a warning even yet, to men in like circumstances. For even in Christian times, how many instances have been seen of ministers of the Church of God so absorbed in the work of their calling as to neglect the training of their children, while children have grown up to be a scandal in the congregation, making the service of God's house to be coloured by the people, and bringing down their father's head with sorrow to the grave.

CRITICAL NOTE TO CHAPTER II.

What is the force of the passage, "*notwithstanding they hearkened not unto the voice of their father, because the Lord would slay them*" (Chap. II., 25).

This might seem to be an assertion of a certain doctrine of foreordination to destruction, which has sometimes been attributed both to Scripture and to certain theologians. Baldly stated it would be that God from the beginning had determined to destroy these young men, and had so arranged it that they would pay no attention to their father's remonstrances, in order that His decree might take effect. But this doctrine would make the Divine Being a participant in their wrong-doing, an idea that is so contrary to the whole of what is revealed that it must be emphatically rejected. The Judge of all the Earth must do *right*. (Gen. xviij., 25). All His ways are judgment; a God of truth and without iniquity, pure and right is He (Deut. xxxii., 4). *God cannot tempt to evil*. (James i., 13). These are fundamental principles of Divine government.

The true mode of looking at such a passage as the foregoing is this; these young men had gone on committing flagrant wickedness, and this in spite of warning from their father that they were sinning against God. God would therefore judge them; it might be that *none could intercede for them* (v. 25), plainly implying that judgment was impending, and that a time might come when it would take its natural course to their destruction. They hearkened not to this; simply by reason that they were hardened in iniquity already. God did not produce this hardness of heart. That was their own. But God simply let them alone. It was His will that judgment should with them take its course; as a warning and example for all time to come.

And the natural course of events did transpire. Left alone by an outraged and justly offended God, their iniquity went on until the day when they were swept from the earth.

CHAPTER III.

THE CALL OF THE CHILD SAMUEL.

(I. Samuel iii.)

The time passes on; the little boy brought by his mother to the Tabernacle grows up, and the testimony about him is almost in the very words afterwards employed to describe the boyhood of Jesus; viz., that *he grew on, and was in favor both with the Lord and also with men.* That there are such children, who appear to be, in Scripture phrase, *sanctified from the womb*, gentle, intelligent, obedient, and good, almost to faultlessness, many Christian families know by experience. Many know the children, or have heard of them, who have a precocious development in sacred things in very early years; fond of Scripture stories, eagerly learning Christian hymns, reverent in prayer, appreciative of Divine service, remembering sermons, and withal so good, so gracious, so beautiful in character as rather to seem to belong to heaven than to earth. Occasionally such heavenliness of character is the accompaniment of a fine delicacy of organization that proves unfit for the stormy atmosphere of the world. Stricken by sickness they pass away in childhood, sometimes with words of heavenly aspiration on their lips, to the presence of Him who declared that *of such is the Kingdom of Heaven*; to blossom and bloom in the eternal Paradise, where storms are unknown,—leaving behind, to sorrowing mothers especially, memories of ineffable preciousness. Such a mother may be seen at times uncovering the box containing the lock of hair, the miniature, perhaps some letter, some token of the one who has gone. And while thus musing and praying, does not heaven itself seem to be opened to her, and the invisible realities of the eternal world become near and manifest; while there is communion of spirit with the child who is gone.

Samuel was doubtless a child of faith, and prayer, and holy consecration; growing up as became his parentage, dedicated to Divine service from a child, and wearing the linen ephod of a priest, though only a Levite by birth. And it is a beautiful touch of motherly human nature, that we read,—*She made him a little coat every year*, and brought it to him when she came up with her husband as he fulfilled his course as a Levite and assisted in the yearly sacrifice. The description of the ephod in the Book of Exodus (chap. xxviii., 6), shows it to have been a highly ornamental garment, *of gold, and blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine twined linen; with an embroidered girdle of the same colors*. And we may, with all reason, fancy this good mother, during the year, as she had time, sorting out these beautiful materials, and working them into the little coat he was to wear in the Tabernacle, having all a mother's joy and pride in seeing her son so beautifully dressed, and being consoled for the loss of him by hearing such good reports about him from the priest and all with whom he had to do.

And here we cannot but be struck, as has been remarked before, with the great contrasts presented by that interesting and saintly child and the depraved and godless sons of the High Priest, who were ministering about the same Tabernacle. And when we are told that Samuel grew on in favor with *men* as well as with God, we are reminded that men, *of themselves*, and even when wicked *themselves*, honor goodness in others, and especially in children. For goodness as displayed in children must be genuine. It adds a charm to beauty of person, if beauty exists, and it makes up for the want of it, if it does not. Who does not love a gentle, obedient, considerate child; and who does not dislike the child that is selfish, greedy, false, and proud? Thus, our blessed Lord, who, when a man, was hated, despised, and rejected of men, was, when a child, *in favor both with God and man*. (Luke ii., 52)

The terrible word spoken to the aged priest by the "man of God" was followed, probably soon after, by the remarkable revelation to this boy Samuel,—the only instance in all sacred history of a boy being made the medium of a prophetic

utterance. But God speaks through whom it pleaseth him, and sometimes by the most unlikely mediums, as once, through Balaam, the enchanter, for example. Need we wonder then, that at this time, He spake through this remarkable boy, and constituted him a prophet; as the people all acknowledged him to be, even at this early age.

But it was a time when the word of the Lord was rarely manifested. "*The word of the Lord was precious in those days; there was no open vision.*" (v. i.). The meaning is not clearly expressed; but it undoubtedly points to the fact that the word of the Lord was *scarce* in those days. Eli was no prophet. There had been no prophet since Deborah's time, a hundred years before. Probably in those days of wickedness the reading of the law had fallen into disuse; the proclamations also from the Mounts Ebal and Gerizim, and much, even, of the teaching of the law in the family, as had been so carefully enjoined. It was a time of the decay of religion, and the prevalence of wickedness, such as was the case in Europe immediately before the Reformation, and in England before the great revival under Wesley and Whitefield. The last of the Old Testament prophets has vividly pictured the time in which he dwelt, as a time when men scoffed at God's ordinances, robbed God's treasury, spoke *stoutly* against his threatenings, and *when those that feared the Lord* (Mal. iii., 16), *spake often one to another; and the Lord hearkened and heard, and a book of remembrance was written!*

There is, in truth, in spiritual things, a perpetual tendency to backsliding, both with the individual and the community. And the life of spiritual religion and true morality has only been maintained, in all ages, both in the Old dispensation and the New, by the raising up, from time to time, of prophets and preachers, who being godly themselves, and endowed with spiritual gifts, taught and preached to their generation so as to bring about a spiritual revival and reformation.*

*The progress of religion in the world (and it is true of the individual also), may be likened to the rising of the tide, which often seems to be going back, and does go back for a time. But let it

So, now, such a change was impending over Israel, to be brought about by this Samuel.

The manner of this first communication to him was very remarkable. The narrative is one of the best known in all Scripture, — and is familiar to every child who has had a Christian education. In the night time, when both the priest and his child attendant were asleep; towards dawn, *ere the lamp of God went out in the temple of the Lord, where the ark of God was* (how the narrative dwells on these details, and makes the scene more vivid) — the Lord calls the child by an audible voice, — again and again, until it becomes apparent that it is no human voice, no priest's, no attendant, but the voice of God Himself. Which, when Eli perceives, he gives direction to the child to answer, "*Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth.*" A most wise direction, the root of all spiritual blessing, a willingness to hear and obey the Divine voice, even as Saul of Tarsus, when stricken, cried out, *trembling and astonished, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do!* The contrary, indeed, — is it not the root of all spiritual declension and the precursor of spiritual ruin? How does the prophet Ezekiel picture the men of his time, to whom he was sent, as rebellious and self-willed; *They will not hearken to me, said the Lord, and they will not hearken to thee.* (Ezek. iii., 7.)

But a holy psalmist, celebrating the goodness of God to the land of Israel, in his own day, cries out, "*I will hear what God the Lord will speak!*" — (Psalm lxxxv.)

But, alas, what a message of wrath this child had to hear; and one cannot wonder that he was awe-struck and afraid to tell Eli of it. It was, in substance, a repetition of the former word spoken by the 'Man of God,' only a still more emphatic declaration of impending judgment. And the wording of it suggests that some time had elapsed between the former

be watched, and it will be seen to flow on again with increased strength, advancing with every successive wave to a higher point on the beach, until, by successive recessions and advancements the highest point is reached and the fulness of the tide has flowed in. Even thus it is with the Kingdom of God.

message and this; and that,—sad to say, the first message had been disregarded. The second message was this;—*Behold, I will do a thing in Israel, at which both the ears of every one that heareth it shall tingle.* (A striking figure of general astonishment and awe.) *In that day I will perform against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house; when I begin I will also make an end! For I have told him that I will judge his house forever for the iniquity which he knoweth; because his sons made themselves vile and he restrained them not !**

And then follows what is a sentence of irreversible doom; a sentence rarely pronounced against any man, and then only when opportunity of repentance and amendment had been persistently neglected. This appears to have been the case with Eli; a good man in the main; zealous, faithful, patriotic; but, alas! with one overmastering fault, a fault so great, and with consequences so terrible to the religious welfare of the people, that it cast all his virtues into the shade. And this after strenuous warning.

The final word is then spoken with that emphasis of an oath of the Divine being, so rarely used;—*“Therefore have I sworn unto the house of Eli that the iniquity of Eli’s house shall not be purged with sacrifice nor offering for ever!”*

Thus then the word was spoken, which, when Eli heard, he received with that submission of heart which indicated an inherently good man. *“It is the Lord. Let him do what seemeth him good!”*

Samuel meanwhile grew on, *and the Lord was with him, and did let none of his words fall to the ground.* This indicates that he began, when of sufficiently ripe years, to speak as a prophet. But none of these utterances are preserv-

*We have in Eli what is not an uncommon development even in these days, viz., that a man, in his private capacity, may be a good, devout, and sincere man, worthy of all respect, while he conspicuously fails in the performance of public duty; which failure may do infinite damage to the cause of truth and righteousness. Surely every man in high position has reason to watch lest failure in public matters should neutralize all the good he may do in private life. For certainly, public duties are, as a rule, more difficult to discharge than private ones. And the consequences of failure may be infinitely more far-reaching and serious.

ed: Yet it was known that he did thus speak; for *all Israel from Dan even to Beer-Sheba knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the Lord.* (v. 19, 20.)

And there were other Divine appearances and utterances in that tabernacle at Shiloh. (v. 21.) And in due time the word of Samuel came to all Israel. (Chap. iv., 1.) Yet none of this word is really known; another amongst many instances of the remarkable *silences* of the Divine word, in a thousand instances where utterances would have been welcomed. How many of our Lord's sayings, for example, are not recorded. What would not the Church of God have given for a full report of that discourse at Nazareth, when *all men wondered at the gracious words that proceeded out of his mouth*, (Luke iv., 22), or of the still more interesting discourse after His resurrection, in which, speaking to the disciples on the way to Emmaus, "*Beginning at Moses and all the prophets he expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.*" (Luke xxiv. 27.)

What endless controversies as to what passages are Messianic, and which are not, would have been set at rest had this discourse been preserved. But the All-Wise willed that it should not be. And, probably, in respect to the last instance, we may find a reason in the fact that we can read the same Scriptures for ourselves, and that, on any rational interpretation of them, according to the principles of the New Testament, we can discern, if we are only willing to see, that *the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.* (Rev. xix., 10.)

CRITICAL NOTE TO CHAPTER III.

As to the threat that the iniquity of Eli's house should not be purged with sacrifice nor offering for ever.

Is it so, that under any circumstances, a man can arrive at such a condition that there is no hope of forgiveness for him? that sacrifice and offering for him are in vain? The answer must be that any man who turns to the Lord and presents the sacrifice and offerings enjoined, will find forgiveness and salvation. Under the Old Testament there were the sacrifices of the Law; under the New Testament the sacrifice of the Cross; and no matter how deep the stain, if the wicked man turns to the Lord with faith in the sacrifice, *though his sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow* (Isalah i., 18). And under the dispensation of the Cross, Jesus himself declares, "*Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out*" (John vi., 37).

But the Divine word intimates, in sundry places, and all experience confirms it, that men may go on in wrong doing so long as to become utterly indifferent to it, and utterly careless of consequences. This is that "*hardness of heart*" which will effectually prevent any man who has it from turning, or repenting, or praying at all. Such as these, come to a condition of utter unbelief in either Divine judgment or Divine mercy. When they hear sermons or re-monstrance, they despise them. It is only priestcraft, they say, mere talk to frighten women and children.

Of such it may sometimes be said,—and a terrible thing it is to say—that it is *impossible* to renew them to repentance. And this being so, of what avail are sacrifices and offerings? They will never plead them; they can never therefore be saved by them. It is of such a state of mind as this that the prophet Hosea speaks in that terrible passage, *Ephraim is joined to his idols. Let him alone* (Hos. iv., 17). For no more terrible doom can befall an ungodly man than to be let alone. And thus it was with these wicked sons of Eli.

CHAPTER IV.

THE DAY OF RETRIBUTION—THE DEFEAT OF THE ARMIES OF ISRAEL BY THE PHILISTINES, AND THE TAKING OF THE ARK.

(I. Samuel iv.)

The Philistines, occupying the fertile plain on the border of the Mediterranean Sea, somewhat south of the plain of Sharon, a fertile plain still, very similar in aspect to what we call a rolling prairie, had many strong cities, well fortified, with gates of brass,—occupying leading positions in the plain, on the coast, and in the low hilly country towards the Judean mountains. The sea port of Jaffa now occupies a commanding position, a little north of that region; and there was once another more famous city still on the coast, viz., the Roman city of *Cæsarea*. Both Jaffa (anciently Joppa), and *Caesarea* are well known in connection with the narrative of the spread of the Gospel under the Apostles. Joppa was a sea port in very early times, for it was from thence that the prophet Jonah took ship when he fled to Tarsish.

But the city is not mentioned in these earlier chronicles, though the Philistines doubtless spread themselves northward beyond the place where it stands to-day. But Gaza, Gath, Ashdod, and Ekron, were fortified cities; none of them, however, being sea ports, and it is evident that by this time the Philistines had attained a high development in the pursuits of war. For it was during the life time of Samuel that the encounter between the young shepherd David and Goliath of Gath took place. Now, Goliath had armor of coat of mail and greaves of brass upon his legs, a gorget of brass between his shoulders, and a shield and a great spear. He was armed, indeed, like a knight of the middle ages; all indicating a high development in war and warlike material. The Philistines, too, must have attained a considerable development in the arts of life; in architecture, for example, as may be seen from the narrative of the doings of Samson. But, as was the case

with all the world except the Jews, they were heathen in religion; idol-worshippers, looking up to and worshipping a god who was half-dish and half-man. Civilization, and the development of art and literature to the very highest degree, have been proved to be consistent with the most debased ideas and practices in religion, as well as the most deplorable developments of wickedness and immorality. It is too true that *the world by wisdom knew not God*. The human intellect in this direction has ever been utterly at fault and blind.

The Philistines being certainly a people of a higher development in war than the Israelites, were very troublesome neighbors. War had broken out while Eli was priest;—which side being the aggressors is not stated. But when battle was joined Israel was defeated with heavy loss. (v. 2.)

What we would call a council of war was then held, and the Elders of Israel very wisely opened up the enquiry, what was the cause of the defeat? Why had the Lord allowed them to be smitten before the Philistines? A timely enquiry;—a pregnant question indeed, and one which, had it been followed up, might have led to the healing of the sore which troubled the land. The wickedness of the priests in high places was well known to the people; but a spirit of judicial blindness seems to have possessed them at the time; else they would have surely seen why it was that God had forsaken them. The time was a time for humiliation before God, for confession, for fasting, for earnest crying for help, with a real turning of heart to the Lord.

But nothing of this sort seems to have been considered. Instead of it, they fell back upon a piece of mere superstition. Let us fetch the Ark of the Covenant of God,—they said,—when that cometh among us, *it may save us out of the hands of our enemies!* (v. 3.)

Now, the ark could not rightly, for any cause whatever, be removed from the Tabernacle. Such special care was required concerning it, that it could never be touched even when the Tabernacle was being taken down and set up again. Staves were provided, for the carrying of it, and all Israel knew that it belonged to the Tabernacle alone.

But in this case, even had its removal been lawful, the idea that prompted it was utterly foreign to the true condition

of this people. They had been taught again and again, that their hope was in the Lord God Himself; that He was nigh for help; that He would hear the cry of His people when in trouble. But at this time, there is no sign of lifting their hearts in faith to God, with acknowledgment of wrong-doing. They must look, forsooth, to this sacred chest; to this mere outward, material thing, that could neither hear, nor see, nor help. They made the Ark into an idol, and they got the help from it that idols give.

But the Ark being in the Tabernacle the consent of the Priest was needful to its being taken. It is plain that he ought not to have given consent; on the contrary, he should have exhorted the people to repent, and cry to God. But he was in old age, and morally paralysed by his failure to restrain his sons. For nothing paralyses like a known and conspicuous failure in duty. How could he exhort and charge the people, he who by his neglect had had so much to do with bringing these calamities upon them. *Facilis descensus averni*. The down grade in character and usefulness is as certain a result of wrong-doing as is the down grade in orthodoxy from the indulgence of unbelief.

Eli then consented; and placed the Ark in charge of Hophni and Phinehas, for conveyance to the camp. Ceremonially he was right in placing the Ark in charge of priests; but this was a case in which ceremony and good morals were utterly at variance. Even were it right to send the Ark;—what profanation to send it by such hands as these! The narrator,—who was doubtless Samuel himself,—is sensible of the high dignity and sacredness of this chest as a symbol, for he calls it, *the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord of Hosts which dwelleth between the Cherubims*. (v. 4.) There is here no thought of trust in this mere material symbol; his mind is directed to *the Lord of Hosts*, who deigned to manifest himself in connection with it.

But, alas! the Lord of Hosts was far from the thoughts of the people. They thought indeed of the Ark, but forgot what it was that was in the Ark. The tables of the Divine Law! But were there not two priests (for Hophni and Phinehas were priests) living in a condition of defiance of the law? The

Mercy Seat and Cherubim !—but were these men seeking Divine mercy? Was the *Holy One* of Israel likely to manifest His presence as Lord of Hosts, with such men as these representing Him? The error of these Israelites was one that is deep-seated in human nature, and of which there were innumerable manifestations in the history of this very people. And there have been innumerable manifestations of it in Christian times, too. To trust in outward ordinances and ceremonies, in images graven and molten; to trust in the Temple, in outward descent, in their being custodians of the law; and all the while forgetful of the Living God—this was the besetting sin of Israel. And the very same thing,—deep seated as it is in human nature,—has had a lamentable development in Christendom also.

Turn to the prophecy of Jeremiah (chap. vii., 4), and we find him denouncing the wickedness of the people, at the very time they are saying, *The Temple of the Lord, The Temple of the Lord are these!* And have not many Christians been saying this for ages? The True Church; the One Church; the Church of St. Peter; the Church of the Apostles,—are we !—while provoking God with idolatries and immoralities. Was it not so in the time of the Prophet Isaiah,—shameful wickedness coincident with multiplied sacrifices? (Isaiah i., 11.) Did not the men of our Saviour's time rest on their being children of Abraham, while he had to unmask them, and declare that they were children of the devil? (John viii., 44.) And has not this been a true picture of certain developments in Christian times; high ceremonial and low morality, strenuous assertion of true descent, while the life gave the lie to there being any true discipleship at all.

So with these Israelites. The Ark,—they said,—the Ark of the Lord,—that will save us. And when it came into the camp they gave a great shout, so that the earth rang again. They shouted, but the Lord Jehovah was not there! But Hophni and Phinehas were !

As to the Philistines, they were as superstitious as the Hebrews. At first a sort of panic seized them. *Woe unto us! said they,—God is come into the camp! Woe unto us!—there hath not been such a thing before. Who shall*

deliver us out of the hand of these mighty gods? These are the gods that smote the Egyptians with plagues in the wilderness! (v. 7, 8.) The talk of panic, as is evident; its very ignorance betrays the foolish gabble of the rank and file of the army. But their leaders were bold and capable men. They soon recovered calmness, and issued a proclamation that rang through the ranks of the Philistine soldiers. *Be strong, and quit yourselves like men, O ye Philistines! that ye be not servants to the Hebrews, as they have been to you; Quit yourselves like men and fight! (v.9.)*

An inspiring proclamation truly, much like many that were issued afterwards by kings and captains of the Hebrews, and whose encouragement was founded on faith in God! But, alas! God was not with His people now. And what could the Ark do for them of itself!

The result was as might have been expected. The Philistines fought like lions. The Israelites gave way. They fled from the field leaving the Ark of God to its fate. (v. 10, 11.) The Ark was taken, and its two guardians, Hophni and Phinehas, were slain; let us hope slain in defending and protecting it; dying more honorably than they had lived. It was a dark day, indeed, for Israel. A second defeat, far worse than the first, and an immense number of soldiers slain,—the flower of the young men of the nation, together with many heads of families, valiant leaders of troops and divisions. It was a day that made thousands of widows and orphans through the land,—and it was the beginning of the judgment of God which had been foretold upon Eli and his house.

Naturally, a messenger of evil things, a Benjamite, ran to Shiloh. There is a strange perverse pleasure in being the first to bear bad news. And this man came, with his clothes rent and ashes upon his head. The men of the city at once saw what had happened; and cried out; not with the shout of triumph, as when the Ark reached the camp, but with a cry of anguish and despair. They cried out, as they had done before when the ill-considered expedition against the Canaanites, after the refusal to enter the land, had been disastrously defeated,—or as when the host of Joshua had been driven

back from Ai,—or to come to modern times, as Scotland after Flodden field, or England after Bannockburn, or the Royalists after Naseby! So the people of Shiloh cried out;—and the High Priest, old, and nearly blind, heard them.

It is a touching picture, this, of the aged priest sitting by the way-side, near the gate of the city (v. 13) full of anxiety for the issue, thinking of the Ark of God which he had allowed to be taken away;—“*for his heart trembled for the Ark of God,*” waiting anxiously also for tidings of his sons, and fearful, doubtless, that this would be the time of threatened judgment. For, like all good men, he had a fatherly heart toward his sons, wicked as they were. The cry of the people, the *noise of their tumult*, was all about him; and presently the man comes in hastily, and in breathless and disjointed sentences cries out to Eli,—*I am he that came out of the army!* Well,—is it victory? Alas, no, for he goes on, *I fled to-day out of the army!* Fled? Then Eli asks,—*What is there done, my son?* as if to say,—Keep nothing back,—tell me the worst.

Then the messenger opens his tale of disaster, in four dismal particulars:—*Israel is fled before the Philistines: There has been a great slaughter among the people: Thy two sons also, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead!*—*alas!*—AND THE ARK OF GOD IS TAKEN!

At the mention of this crowning calamity, which was a condemnation of himself, as High Priest, in allowing the Ark to leave its place; and which would destroy the significance of the very Tabernacle itself (for the Tabernacle was only a dwelling for the Ark), (II. Sam. vii., 2), the old man was stunned, and *fell off his seat backward by the gate. And his neck brake, and he died!*

A more pathetic ending of life, for one who had, in the main, in his private character, and as a priest, done well, has scarcely ever been recorded. But it is a terrible instance of how one overmastering fault may neutralize and destroy a host of virtues. For his laxity and good nature ruined his sons, brought disrepute on Divine ordinances, and caused calamity to the nation. He was a father, in a position of rule and authority over his children, which he neglected to exercise. But he was also the temporal ruler of the land;

he judged Israel forty years: As such, it was his province to preserve order, to punish crime, to banish evil-doers;—all which, in the case of his sons, and also of the disorderly women who assembled about the Tabernacle, he neglected to do. He had more regard for his sons than for the honor of God; this is the terrible indictment against him. And this was the ruin both of the sons and of the father.

The story of the tragedy with which this sad episode closes is one of the most pathetic in history, and adds a deeper gloom to the clouds which gathered around the house of Eli and the nation.

The wife of the second son, Phinehas, was near the time of birth of her child; and when she heard the terrible tidings of the death of her husband, of her father-in-law, and her brother-in-law, also of the taking of the Ark,—her pains came upon her. The shock was violent;—and brought on a mortal agony. When the child proved to be a son (and we know how the Hebrew women of the time longed for sons), the women in attendance said to the dying woman, "*Fear not, thou hast borne a son.*" (v. 20.) But, alas,—this was no comfort to her. *She answered not, neither did she regard it.* Her thoughts were wholly fixed on the calamity to the nation in the loss of the Ark; and she named the child *ICHABOD* (meaning, *Where is the glory!*) saying, *The glory is departed from Israel,—for the Ark of God is taken:* And with these words on her lips the poor woman expired.

She was evidently a good woman, though mated so unsuitably to a bad man. Highly patriotic, with a deep and fervent love for her country, she was also fervently religious, and devout. The Ark could not be a mere idol to her;—it was the *Ark of God!* The Divine glory had shone around it. It was the symbol of Divine presence, and leadership and protection in the wilderness, and in the days when Canaan was being conquered. All devout Hebrews revered it for what it contained,—the very original stones on which the Law of God was written, and the pot of manna of the wilderness, as well as for the golden covering called the Seat of Mercy, with the cherubims of glory overshadowing. It was, indeed, the *glory* of Israel, not when made an idol of, but when rightly used to remind them of, and bring them

near to the Divine presence. The making an idol of it was now being condemned and punished by its being permitted by Almighty God, to fall into the hands of heathen enemies. Defeat, disaster, and national humiliation had all come upon the land, Samuel being still a young man. But he was now the hope of Israel. And in due time, being recognized as a prophet, he addressed the stirring exhortation to the people to turn to the Lord of which we shall read in subsequent chapter.

NOTE.—This chapter contains two phrases which have become classic in ecclesiastical language. The first is the statement that the old priest "*trembled for the ark of God*," a phrase that has passed into use as indicating the concern which good, but doubting people have for the state of religion in evil times, or for the welfare of the Church of God when threatened, or for some mission enterprise in times of persecution, the "*ark of God*" standing as a symbol for the cause of God in any of these aspects.

The other is the despairing exclamation of the dying widow of Phineas, *Ichabod*, the glory is departed; and is constantly used in modern times to indicate disaster and impending ruin. When we say "*Ichabod is written on the walls*," and men do say this sometimes of the Church, or some congregation of it, or of some denomination in it, we are transferring the despair of the Hebrew widow to the circumstances of our own time, and saying in the most terse language possible that a noble cause is lost.

CHAPTER V.

THE ARK IN THE HANDS OF THE PHILISTINES.

(Chap. v and vi.)

The story contained in these two chapters as to what happened to the Ark after its capture, appears at first sight to be more nearly like the superstitious tales, the "*old wives' fables*," of the middle ages, than any other in the Old Testament. But a closer consideration will show that behind the almost ludicrous incidents related, there is the working of a Divine purpose, and the display of Divine power for its accomplishment. And this is the true test of any story of miraculous occurrences,—as has been observed in our studies of the miracles of the Book of Exodus. Is there an adequate purpose to be accomplished, tending to the exaltation of the Divine Sovereign of the earth or to the deliverance of some whom He has promised to deliver? And is that purpose such as could not be accomplished by the ordinary working of Providence and government, but must require the putting forth of a manifest extraordinary power. The prophet Isaiah speaks, in one of his noblest passages (chap. xxvi., 21), of the Lord *coming out of His place* to punish the people for iniquity:—a most suggestive phrase, and indicating that there are times when unusual and extraordinary things are brought about by Divine power,—*when God, in fact, comes out of His place*. And the question is, (if we may put the matter to question at all), were the circumstances related such as naturally to lead up to Divine intervention and to a display of Divine power? A fair consideration must lead us to answer, Yes. For, let us consider. The Philistines were idolaters. They worshipped a god called Dagon (the name meaning *little fish*;) having the head and body human and the lower parts like a fish. In fact, we have the very idea of this god Dagon in our fanciful conception of the *mermaid*. A very natural kind of god to be worshipped by people who

dwelt along the sea coast. And they honored their god, and believed in him, and trusted him, For it is noticeable, as a rule, how much more zealous the devotees of idols are than the worshippers of the true and living God. We met this god Dagon before in the history of Samson. For when that most unfortunate of the Hebrew judges fell into Philistine hands, they gave the glory of the capture to Dagon. (Judges xvi., 23), and offered a great sacrifice in his honor, lords and common people together rejoicing and saying, *Our god hath delivered into our hands our enemy, and the destroyer of our country.*

Now, when the Ark was taken, the Philistines brought it down to the city of *Ashdod*, where there was a temple of Dagon, as there was also at Gaza. They then took the ark, doubtless with great triumph and rejoicing, and placed it in the temple, setting it by Dagon; just as, in after years, they took the armor of Saul and brought it to the temple of Ashtaroth, and as David brought the sword of Goliath and placed it in the Tabernacle; all this being an acknowledgement of help from above in gaining victory. We have, in fact, the same custom amongst ourselves, for the tattered and shot-riddled colors of the regiments of our foes are often enough, in time of war, hung up in our churches, at this very day. Thus, then, the Ark was placed in the house of Dagon. And they would rejoice over it, and cry out, See how powerful our god is; he hath overcome the gods who brought our enemies out of Egypt!

Now we may see a reason for Divine intervention to confound these idol-worshippers, and demonstrate the helplessness of their gods. Even so, in the time of the prophet Isaiah, the great gods of Babylon are represented as being loaded on carts, a *burden to the weary beasts* that drew them, and unable to deliver themselves. (Isaian xlv., 1.)

For, in the night time, the image of Dagon was caused to fall down; and it is significantly added, he was found in the morning *fallen upon his face to the earth before the Ark of the Lord.* (Chap. v., 3.)

And they took Dagon, and set him up again,—surely with a lingering doubt as to the power of a god who required helping up. So we might think; but the experience of

generations, down even to our own day, demonstrates that idolaters very rarely realize the folly of trusting in gods that require to be lifted up. The more ignorant (and that comprises the great majority), of the devotees in a Catholic community will complacently see an image of the Virgin or St. Peter hauled about one day, as if it were a chair or a table, (it has been seen amongst ourselves), and the next day bow down before it, say prayers to it, and shew by every sign of adoration that they really trust in it,—that is, in the very material image, and not merely in the being it represents. That their trust is in the material object itself is proved by the fact that some images of the Virgin are held in much higher favor than others. When some shrines of a saint are much more resorted to than others, it is plain that the attention and thought of the worshippers are directed to the image and not to the Virgin or the saint.

But, in truth, this is the invariable tendency of all religious representation in the shape of statues and images. No matter how, at the beginning, the thoughts of the worshippers are directed to the personage represented by the image, there is speedily developed an increasing tendency to think of the statue itself; and, in time, that exercise of the mind which carries the worshipper away from the visible image to an unseen personage, ceases in a majority of cases altogether. The power of the visible prevails altogether over the invisible. Sight triumphs over faith. It was with perfect knowledge of human nature and its tendencies, that, in the enunciation of the Moral Law, the precept, "*Thou shalt have none other gods before me,*" was amplified and followed up by the second, *Thou shalt not make to thyself any graven image;—thou shalt not bow down to them nor worship them.*

The profound and subtle genius of Dr. Newman was exercised, after he had become a Roman Catholic, in tracing out the development of Christianity from what it was in Apostolic times, to what it has become in modern days. There has been development, indeed marvellous development; but the development has been the product of human nature acting on a Divine institution, and depraving it. And in nothing has the depravation been more manifest than in the manner in which statues and images have acquired a permanent place

in Catholic churches. And nowhere can the working of depravation in worship be more clearly traced. Whatever may be the thoughts and ideas of educated and cultured worshippers, it is certain that with the great multitude, the sentiments of honor, reverence and adoration are concentrated on the statues alone. But in all this, we simply see the working of human nature, which had been essentially the same from the beginning. All its workings in religion have been in the direction of embodying religious ideas in images and statues. Even Buddhism, which essentially is a religion without a god at all, has had the same development.

Thus, then, we can perfectly understand this business of the setting up of a fish-god by men who lived on the borders of the sea. But on their borders in the mountainous interior was a nation of an entirely different development;—the development not being human, but Divine. And though the people charged with the preservation of the Divine ideal proved themselves, at times, unworthy of it, the unseen Lord of the whole earth, was still manifesting His power amongst them, sometimes to punish, sometimes to preserve. But He manifested his power amongst the idolatrous nations round about also. He had been so doing from the time the Israelites came out of Egypt. And He was now, in the time of this narrative, manifesting His power amongst these Philistine people by casting their god down to the ground. And when the idol is set up again, it is again thrown down with such violence that only the stump of the image is left. Then plagues are caused to break out, and, as a consequence, a council of nobles is summoned. *What are we to do with the Ark of the God of Israel?* they said. And they answered one to another, Let the Ark be carried to *Gath*. But the plague broke out there also,—and the Ark was sent on to *Ekron*. But the people of *Ekron*, in their alarm, cried out, Send the Ark of the God of Israel to its own place. (v. 11.)

During the whole time the Ark was in Philistia, some seven months in all, there were plagues of such a character as to suggest that they were a punishment for licentiousness. The worship of Dagon was doubtless one of the many forms under which Baal and Ashtaroth were worshipped, and the worship

especially in time of festivity, was always with lascivious dancings and debauchery. Hence the character of the plagues—which were of the same kind, beyond doubt, as those *diseases of Egypt* which were threatened upon the Israelites if unfaithful to God. Thus again we see the Divine hand put forth in judgment by the use of natural means, the natural being subservient to the supernatural, and directed by an Allwise Power to the accomplishment of destined ends.

It may, however, be asked why the God of Israel did not put forth His power to prevent the Ark being captured at all? It is not difficult to see the reason for this. The Ark was suffered to be captured as part of the Divine judgment by which the scandalous profanations of the Tabernacle worship were punished. The Ark was the peculiar glory of Israel, a thing unique in the world. Other religions had their altars, their sacrifices, their incense, their priests, equally with Israel. But none of them had a sacred chest like this embodying as it did so strikingly the ideas of Divine justice and Divine mercy. None of these religions had a moral law, written with the finger of God,—on two tables of stone, (a law that still commends itself to the conscience of civilized mankind), if, indeed, in the case of most of them, there was anything corresponding to a moral law at all.—But the capture of the Ark was suffered in order that the outraged moral law might be vindicated. And vindicated it was effectually, for no such scandals as those of Hophni and Phinehas were ever seen thereafter.

The Philistines, however, had found the Ark to be a most dangerous conquest, and were wisely advised by their priests and diviners to send it back with presents. (Chap. vi., 2,3,.) But more. The priests advised its being sent back with a *Trespass offering*, indicating a secret consciousness of wrongdoing against the God of Israel in treating His sacred ark as no better than their god Dagon. So then when the priests advised the return of the ark with all due honor, and that *glory should be given to the God of Israel*, and that their people *should not harden their hearts as the Egyptians and*

Pharaoh had done, (v. 5, 6), it is plain that the demonstration of Divine power had had its effect. The God of Israel was a more powerful God than Dagon. Yet, it must not be supposed that these priests and diviners were converted to the Jewish faith, and led to embrace the idea of there being one God alone, the supreme Lord of all things in earth and heaven. That was far beyond their thoughts. The heathen conception was always of many gods; a god for the sea, a god for the sky, a god for agriculture, a god for war; a god for this nation and another god for that. But to show how utterly foreign to their ideas was that of the gods being specially *good*, it is sufficient to remember that there was,—(in the developed polytheism of later days), a god for *drunkenness*, another for *thieving*, and another for *licentiousness*. These ideas were embodied in the worship of the Temples; and were not deemed,—as Christians would deem them,—profane and scandalous. For the idea of God as supremely *Holy*, a God of *truth and without iniquity*, a God of justice and righteousness, has always been far from the thoughts of the natural man. The Philistines then conceived of the God of the Hebrews, as only one amongst the gods they knew of. But they were now sure that He was more powerful than Dagon; though there is no sign,—nor was there ever after any sign,—of their abandoning their gods, and accepting Jehovah alone.

The manner in which they determined to send the ark back is thoroughly in accord with the ideas which have been universal in heathenism. To judge by the flight of birds, the movement of clouds, and many other such signs, was always the very function of priests and diviners. It is perfectly natural for them, then, to direct that the ark should be set upon a new cart, and that the two milch kine attached to it should be allowed to take their own way. If they took the way to the Israelites' country, it would be a sign that the ark had brought the plagues upon them,—if not they must judge that they had come by chance. So the diviners counselled. But when the *kine took the straight way leading to Bethshe-mesh*, a border town, and *went along the highway, lowing as they went* (v. 13), (for they had been separated from their calves), the Philistines were sure that some supernatural

power was about the ark. And so, as the ark could not be *their* ark,—they gladly relinquished it, and with it, as they hoped, the cause of their calamities.

The whole story is one of superstition, and bears evidence of reality. But it is superstition of a very human sort, the very same as that which prevailed in the world down to Christian times; and, to say truth, also in Christian times. For, as has been seen, very much of what is connected with one form of Christian development,—even in this very century, is emphatically of the same sort.

The story of what happened after the ark had arrived in the land of Israel is partly natural, but in part strange to the last degree.

That the men of Bethshemesh should receive it with rejoicing is perfectly natural; so we read that they clave the wood of the cart, kindled the fire of sacrifice and offered the kine as a burnt offering on a great rock near the city. And the ark itself was handled by the Levites, as was proper under such extraordinary circumstances; but that a terrible judgment and loss of life should come upon the men of Bethshemesh (v. 19), for merely looking into the ark is one of the things that is indeed hard to understand. One thing, however, is certain, that no man or set of men could be punished, in that or any other age, but for wilful violation of known law. The looking, to bring down any punishment at all, must have been of a peculiarly vain and idle kind, and done in violation of the sanctity thrown around the ark by the Levitical law. The people must have known of this extraordinary sanctity. The ark must not be touched, in ordinary circumstances, even by the Levites, for staves were expressly provided for the purpose of carrying it. (These staves, of course, would be lost, when the ark was taken by the Philistines.) It was the place of Divine manifestation. It went before the people when they wandered in the wilderness. It was so peculiarly identified with the Presence of their Almighty Leader, that, as we read in the Book of Numbers. (Chap. x., 35.) *When the ark set forward Moses said, Rise up, Lord, and let thine enemies be scattered. And when it rested he said, Return, O Lord, to the many*

thousands of Israel. Anything like trifling, or the indulgence of vain curiosity or the treating of it as if it were a heathen idol; in forgetfulness of the great God whose Presence had been so often manifested in connection with it, — was to be looked upon and punished as a grievous sin.

The severity of the punishment indeed staggers us, and we cannot understand why such a terrible example should be made. And, after all our conjecturing, and reasoning, after all endeavors to find out so deep a mystery, we can but acknowledge it to be inscrutable, and fall back on that key to so many mysteries, "*Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right!*"

CRITICAL NOTE AS TO THE NUMBER OF MEN WHO WERE SMITTEN AT BETHSHEMISH.

With regard to the number smitten, which is stated to be fifty thousand and three score and ten men, we cannot doubt that this is one of the cases (see studies in the Book of Exodus) in which an error has crept into the text in the course of transcribing.

That some errors with respect to numbers have crept into the text is certain, and equally certain it is that errors in transcribing numbers are inevitable, no matter how much care may have been exercised. That the original numbers as it came from the hand of the writer (most probably Samuel himself) was accurate, is also certain. But though there has been a Divine inspiration directing the thoughts of the writers of the Scriptures, it is nowhere promised that a Divine guidance shall supervise the men who are merely making copies. It was in this process of copying, during ancient times, that any errors crept in.

But let it ever be borne in mind that details of numbers rarely have any bearing on the great purpose for which Scripture was written.

Whether three hundred or three thousand were slain in a certain battle is of no moment, but it is a matter of quite moment whether the battle was from right motives, whether God was for or against, and whether the result was or was not for the advancement of His kingdom. And these matters are always made plain beyond peradventure. No man need stumble over the text which states the number smitten to have been fifty thousand. It is absolutely certain that the number is an error of copyists.

CHAPTER VI.

SAMUEL AS JUDGE.

(I. Samuel vii.)

It is remarkable, that, although Samuel was acknowledged as the leader and judge of the people from the time he attained manhood, very little of what he did or said in this capacity has been recorded. He lived for some time after the people had insisted on a king being placed over them; but such of his words and work as are recorded after that event were rather those of a prophet than a secular leader. His son, whom he had intended to succeed him, walked not in his ways; a singular instance of history repeating itself, at a very early day, though we hear no such scandalous things of them as we do of the sons of Eli. But during the years in which he was Judge one remarkable event took place, that has left its stamp upon the history. And a glimpse is given, in one or two brief verses of the ordinary course of his life in the peaceful years that succeeded.

The ark had been removed from Bethshemesh to Kirjath Jearim, further up the hill country, at the earnest request of the people who had been so sorely punished for their vain curiosity. And the men of Kirjath Jearim, having *fetch'd up* the ark of the Lord (for the town was well up amongst the hills of Judah, and survives to this day), brought it to the house of one Aminadab *in the hill*. There Eleazar his son was set apart to keep the ark of the Lord; and there it remained for years. Of the Tabernacle at Shiloh at this time we hear not a word. Probably it had been left desolate after the terrible defeat of the Israelitish forces and the death of Eli and his sons. Certainly we hear nothing of it during all the remaining history of Samuel, or during the reign of Saul. The first glimpses we get of it are in the reign of David; but of this it is not time now to speak.

It was while the ark was at Kirjath Jearim that a change for the better seems to have begun amongst the people. *They lamented, we are told, after the Lord!*—Not after the ark, for they had it back again, but *after the Lord.*

Lament—the first sign of awakening, in man or community, is sorrow for sin, and grief in thinking of better days in the past. “*Oh, that it were with me as in days that are past, when the candle of the Lord shone upon my soul.*” This has been the language of many a man and woman, who after knowing the joys of the love of God and the promises of the world to come, has been overcome by the pressing forces of this present world, “*the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches,*” getting the mastery. But to such a man, it almost invariably happens that a time of reflection supervenes—some bereavement, some disappointment, some reversal of business; perhaps the loss of everything, throws the heart back upon itself and drives the world out. Then, the man comes to himself,—to his better self,—he “*laments after the Lord,*” as these Israelites did; and with a softened heart, he says to himself, *I will arise and go to my Father, and will say, Father, I have sinned.*”

Then the word of the preacher and the prophet, which has so long sounded in the ear like a mere note of pleasant music (Ezek. xxxiii.), becomes instinct with spiritual life, calling to a renewal of the old vows, and giving power to perform them.

Thus it was with these Hebrews. It is interesting to note that the first recorded words of Samuel were now spoken. And the words were such as became a prophet such as he was. There is not a word about the ark, or the Tabernacle, or the sacrifices, or the offerings. These were the mere externals; valueless in themselves, apart from a right disposition of the worshipper, as all Scripture shows, Old and New Testament alike. And it was a time to recall them to spiritual realities, for they had grievously sinned and stumbled by reason of trusting in the mere outward symbol. The word, then, was this:

“*If ye will return unto the Lord with all your hearts,—put away the strange gods and Ashtaroth from among you and prepare your hearts unto the Lord.*” (v. 3.)

What is this,—this perpetual down-sliding,—this leaving the pure worship of the living God for such a religion as the worship of Baal and Ashtaroah,—what is it, but the strong bias of human nature in favor of the lusts of the flesh? These could be indulged to a man's heart's desire by a votary of Baal, while still performing all the outward ceremonies of religion. The whole religious history of the Jews is the record of a perpetual and ever-renewed conflict between the tendencies of human nature,—left free by idolatrous systems, —and the Divine law of restraint, by which those tendencies were beaten down. It is not, as some not-over-wise critics have supposed, merely a choice between one religion and another; either one being as good as the other,—as one might choose between Brahminism and Buddhism,—or in Greece between the worship of Mars or that of Apollo,—but the choice between a religion wholly devised by human fancy, and wholly destitute of restraining moral power,—and the submitting the mind and the life to the direction and control of a Divine lawgiver, the very essence of whose rule is to restrain, to beat down, and finally to root out, the corrupt tendencies which are inherent in the nature of man. In this, the Old Testament agrees absolutely with the New.

Samuel, as a true prophet of the living God, called, not merely for a formal putting away of false gods, but for a *submission of heart* to the Lord. For a mere bowing the knee, and acknowledgment with the lip, even when the object of worship is the Lord, may be little better,—indeed, no better,—than the worship of Baal and Ashtaroah.

And the people responded to the call. They put away their gods. They *prepared their hearts*, (v. 3). It was a time of real reformation: like to many subsequent ones in their own history; and to many such in Christian times. And the outward sign of the heart reformation was a time of *fasting and prayer*, observed at Mizpeh,—for Shiloh must at this time have become utterly deserted. Dishonored it had been,—and its desertion was a natural consequence. But, at Mizpeh occurred a significant ceremony, a something which seems to have been a foreshadowing of Christian baptism. The people drew water; and *poured it out before the Lord*. This was not a baptism of persons;—and it was not an

observance of anything commanded in the law. But it was certainly a sign of purification; and purification, at such a time, was the one thing of which the nation stood in need. It may have been also a sign of thanksgiving, as was that significant ceremony of pouring out water from Siloam at the Feast of Tabernacles in the time of our Saviour.

But was not more than a religious ceremony there?

There was. Samuel, we are told, *judged* the people at Mizpeh. This judging, doubtless had reference to individuals. There were wrongs to be redressed; for the forsaking the Lord meant the oppressing of the poor by the rich; the taking of inheritances wrongfully by fraud or force; exaction and extortion, as in the time of Nehemiah. It certainly meant also dishonor to woman, and injury to family life;—all of which are vividly pictured in the prophets of a later time as the fruit of idolatries and formalities. The burning words of the prophet Isaiah to the people whom he called to repentance were applicable to the times of Samuel; indeed,—are they not applicable to Christian times, too? Cease to do evil; learn to do well; *Seek judgment; relieve the oppressed;—(or righten them, as the margin more exactly has it); judge the fatherless; plead for the widow.* (Isaiah i.) This was the kind of judgment needed, and a revival, or reformation of religion that is not followed by such fruits is a mere flash in the pan;—a *sounding brass and tinkling cymbal.*

Mizpeh was not far from the Philistine country. What is the significance of this?

Very significant, for the report of this great religious gathering was not long in finding its way down into the low country. (v. 7.) It was a religious gathering; an assembly not for drill and practice of arms, but for fasting and prayer. What a time,—thought the Philistine leaders,—to fall upon our enemies and annihilate them! The word was passed from city to city. A host was hastily assembled, for not much preparation was needed for such armies, and anything like a modern declaration of war was an unheard of thing. The whole affair was exactly like some aspects of the Indian warfare of this Continent, when the braves of a tribe, knowing that some of their enemies are about to celebrate a

religious festival, organize themselves for attack, march by unsuspected paths, fall upon their foes unawares, and often succeed in annihilating them.

The first note of alarm at Mizpeh was sounded probably by some who were looking down into the valley and saw a host of armed men slowly mounting round the sides of the hills, not many miles away. The alarm spread quickly through the camp of Israel; and, very naturally, *they were afraid*. What people would not be, under such circumstances? But though afraid they were not panic-stricken; though they well might have been. They did not disperse and fly to their homes, but did exactly what they ought to have done. There was now no superstitious talk about the ark. They were cured of such folly. They go to Samuel; and entreat him to *cry to the Lord* for help. (Chap. vii., 8.) Here was a proof of genuine repentance; they had got back to the firm foundation of faith in God's covenant and promise. And their faith was justified by the result.

Let us mark the method of Samuel. He did not simply pray; he offered a sacrifice, a sacrifice of whole burnt-offering, the sacrifice of a lamb, placing himself and the people most surely on the line of Divine blessing; he, in this, being a forerunner of the countless multitude, who in days then far distant were to place their trust on the sacrifice of the "*Lamb of God*," that whole burnt offering for the expiation of the sins of the world.

And the Lord heard; as he heareth always, such a cry, with such an offering, and for such a purpose.

Now let us mark; it was while Samuel was in the very act of offering the sacrifice that the Philistine host burst upon them, reckoning doubtless on an easy victory. And certainly to all human appearance, it was a case for a terrible rout, and slaughter. There were some armed men in the Israelitish gathering—as is evident from the sequel. But the bulk must have been unarmed, from the very purpose of the gathering, and it is probable that there were numbers of women amongst them. The attack was like the bursting of a Saxon horde upon a British village,—or of a horde of Danes, creeping up one of the eastern rivers of England and falling suddenly on a peaceful community of Saxons.

Nothing but a Divine interposition could save the Israelites; and Divine interposition came of a very marked sort.

A great thunderstorm suddenly rose;—it burst on the Philistine host, and, as the army of Sisera had been utterly discomfited under similar circumstances, so the Philistines were discomfited before Israel.

Blinded and stunned by the storm, (and storms are very furious among these hills as the writer knows by experience), they were driven down the pass; and pursued by the Israelites to the very border of their own country. (v. 11.) For a small body of courageous men could drive before them, under such circumstances, a much larger body,—like a flock of sheep. But the victory was the Lord's.

But was it not strange, says one,—that such a thunder storm should have been caused to arise,—as it were out of a clear sky, at that particular moment? But what is there strange in the sudden gathering of a thunder storm in a hilly country? Nothing is more common, in certain states of the atmosphere and wind. Storms may be hours in gathering, or they may be only minutes. A north-east wind would bring that storm over from the Mountains of Ephraim in less time than it took the Philistine host to cover the last stage of their march. And coming from that quarter, as it undoubtedly did, it would drive right into the faces of the host so as to almost blind them. Any man of military instinct amongst the Israelites,—or why not Samuel himself—would see the advantage to Israel at once and seize the opportunity, as Wellington did at Salamanca. For the storm would be at their backs. They would not be incommoded, and they could charge down hill. So that a very much smaller force so situated, could put a much larger one to flight. Thus, doubtless it came about. But, as to the storm coming at that particular moment;—let us consider. Doubtless the storm was gathering, in the natural order of events on that day up amongst the mountains. It depended on the course of the wind. Well. What then; does the Divine word not tell us of the Divine power over the wind? Does not God *hold the wind in his fists*? (Prov. xxx., 4.) Does not the *stormy wind fulfil*

his word? (Psalm cxlviii.) "*Thou didst blow with thy wind,*" sang the Israelites after the destruction of their enemies in the Red Sea. Did not Jesus, the Divine Son of God, show his power over the wind when he stilled the storm?

It is true philosophy, as well as reverent theology, to acknowledge the Lord of all the earth as ruling the winds and the clouds. Even as in the Book of Job, in that marvellous thirty-eighth chapter, the Lord Himself asks, contrasting the weakness of man with the power of a God who rules. "*Canst thou lift up thy voice to the clouds, that abundance of waters may cover thee? Canst thou send lightnings, that they may go, and say unto thee,—Here we are?*" (v. 34, 35.) Or, as in the preceding chapter, "*Hast thou considered the balancing of the clouds, the wonderful works of Him that is perfect in knowledge?*" (v. 16.) While the answer comes, "*He thundereth with the voice of His excellency! God thundereth marvellously with His voice.*" (v. 5.) All which are what we call natural phenomena; but here—in this book of Divine philosophy,—the curtain that hides the source of all natural phenomena, is lifted, and we see the mighty hand behind them all.

And, let it be specially noted in this connection, we see the providential and spiritual direction also,—for, do not read farther,—"*it*,"—that is the wind and the cloudy storm, as in this very day of discomfiture to the Philistines, *is turned round about by His counsels*:—and for a reason,—sometimes, and in answer to prayer,—"*He causeth it to come—whether it be for correction, or for His Land, or for Mercy.*" (Job xxxvii., 13.)

Yes; we may stand still—even in these days, so far distant, and behold the Divine power working, through the instrumentality of the natural powers He has created,—on a great and special occasion—for correction to enemies, and for mercy to His land and people.

This great victory, which was probably obtained somewhere in the early part of Samuel's official life, was celebrated, as has been common in all ages, by the erection of a pillar. But the celebration was not made the occasion of vain-glory, as has so often been the case in modern times; but was used to give glory to Him to whom all glory is due; viz., to the Lord

of Hosta. Samuel caused the stone to be erected, and he called it by a significant name,—*Eben-Ezer*—the *Stone of Help*:—saying—*Hitherto the Lord hath helped us.* (v. 12.) A truth lying at the root of the national life of these people; constantly forgotten in times of declension, brought to mind to mind again by prophets in times of revival, and embodied in numbers of the lyrics and odes we call psalms, in which the hope and faith of God's faithful ones are expressed for all time. And though the word *Eben-ezer* has in these days become almost synonymous, in the mind of some, with littleness and narrowness in religion, it, nevertheless, by its being so often chosen as a name by which assemblies of Godfearing people designate their houses of worship, shows how instinct these words are with spiritual power, and how appropriate they are for the expression of that Faith in God which subsists the same amidst all changes of dispensation, nationality, and ecclesiastical constitution.

CHAPTER VII.

THE MOVEMENT FOR A KING.

(Chapter viii.)

The victory related in the preceding chapter was followed by a general rising of the Israelitish people, and a carrying the war into Philistia; the results being exactly those promised in the Law of Moses in case the people were faithful to their covenant with God. They were uniformly successful, and even recovered cities which had been taken from them after former defeats, and had been in the hands of the Philistines for years. This course of uninterrupted success continued until the Philistines were *subdued*;—not that they were brought under the rule and dominion of Israel, for they were not. But their power for mischief was, for the time, broken; *they came no more into the coast of Israel* all the days when Samuel was Judge; (Chap. vii., 13), Israel, therefore, was left to pursue the arts of peace; and for many years the country was in that happy condition which has been described in the saying, "happy is the land which has no history."

But from the events that transpired in the reign of Saul, it is evident that the Philistines, during this long period of peace,—which lasted apparently thirty or forty years,—were diligently improving themselves in military arts, drilling and perfecting their equipments, probably accumulating warlike stores, and preparing for that successful invasion which culminated in the disastrous defeat and death of Saul. Just what France did after the German war; what Peter the Great did after the defeats of his early days,—what the United States did after the early disasters of the civil war,—this did these Philistines when peace succeeded the defeats of the days of the early days of Samuel.

We have in the last lines of the seventh chapter a brief insight into certain methods of administering justice, which

singularly survive in these modern times in England, and in some parts of her colonies. The judges of England, as is well known, "go on circuit"; as it is technically termed; holding assize courts in various county towns within a certain district. This is exactly what is related of Samuel. *He went from year to year in circuit, to Bethel, and Gilgal, and Mizpeh, and judged Israel in all those places.* (Chap. vii., v. 16.) A small tract of country, indeed, hardly covering the limits of one tribe; and one can scarcely conceive that his administration was entirely confined to so limited an area. For he certainly was officially Judge over the whole land; there was no other. And justice would need to be administered in every tribe, as well as in Benjamin and Ephraim. Probably, therefore, he administered it in more distant places by deputies, he acting as supreme judge of what was practically a court of appeal; exactly as had been recommended to Moses by his sage father-in-law, Jethro. (Exodus xviii., 21, 22.) Be that as it may, we certainly have here an orderly and systematic administration of justice, in assizes held year by year, the judge "going on circuit." And, as we are told that his return was to Ramah, where was his house; and that he judged Israel there; it seems certain that in this central place a permanent court was established.

Ramah also became a centre of worship, for Samuel there built an altar unto the Lord. But, strange to say, there is not one word about the Tabernacle. And the ark was allowed to remain in Kirjath Jearim, all which was doubtless by Divine monition, and to show the Israelitish people that the Divine presence and blessing were independent of places, and material objects; a lesson that they much needed to learn; as many have also in the times now present. Thus the time passed on uneventfully, during all the active years of Samuel's administration. But at length events transpired which contained the seeds of other events of supreme importance, which influenced the destiny of Israel for all future time.

Samuel married, but of his wife the narrative tells us nothing. Two sons were born to him, and when he was well on in years, he appointed them to office as deputy judges under him. Their circuit extended as far south as Beersheba.

But the perversity of human nature was again manifest in the character of these sons. True it is, that whatever else may come by heredity, grace does not. Yet it is singular that two such striking examples as these should succeed one another so closely as in the cases of Eli and Samuel. Eli's two sons were the disgrace of the land. Samuel's sons went astray too, not in so scandalous a manner;—but they did turn aside; and in a way that had been expressly referred to in the civil law of Moses. (Exod. xxiii., 8.) *They turned aside after lucre.* That "*auri sacra fames*": the cursed thirst for gold,—that *love of money*, which—as the Apostle said, is a root—(not the root) of all evil,—which has touched thousands of officials since then,—which has eaten out the heart of official life in more than one country of the times we live in;—alas! this terrible evil entered the house even of such a man as Samuel. For himself, he was so free from it, that on laying down his office, he could make a confident and solemn appeal to the whole people; calling God to witness—as he said to them, "*Whose ox have I taken, or whose ass have I taken. or whom have I defrauded? Whom have I oppressed? or of whose hand have I received a bribe to blind mine eyes therewith?*"

And they answered, "*Thou hast not defrauded us, nor oppressed us; neither hast thou taken aught of any man's hand.*" (Chap. xii., 3.) An honorable record had Samuel,—the greater pity and shame that the like could not be said of his sons. Had they been like-minded with him, the whole course of Jewish history might have been altered, even as that of England might have been had Richard Cromwell been able to grasp the rod of power held by his father.

But they were not so like-minded, and the corruption of their administration at length grew to such a height that an open revolt took place. With that revolt the era of government by judges came to an end.

It may seem strange, indeed, that it had not come to an end long before. For it is a most noticeable thing that the office of judge was not held continuously. The judges did not succeed one another, as one sovereign succeeds another in England; as one President succeeds another in the United States or in France. There were long periods in which there

was no chief magistrate in the land at all; neither a leader with Divine authority like Moses, nor a commander of the army like Joshua, nor a king like those who came after Samuel. The office of Judge, as was pointed out in the studies of the Book of Judges, was always exercised by one who had been called out in some emergency. And no successor was ever appointed at his death. A singular condition of things indeed in a civilized state, and one may well wonder, brought up, as we have been, under a system which has endured for more than a thousand years, in which the office of supreme magistrate of some kind is continuous,—how society could hold together in the absence of it.

But, let us consider. This old Hebrew state was a different one from any that has ever existed on the earth:—and in nothing was the difference more marked than in this—that the Hebrew State was founded on the principle of an *absolute monarchy*, combined with a perfect democracy, the monarch being no earthly ruler, but the Lord Jehovah Himself, and under Him all being equal. God was king. He had given, through His servant Moses, a code of law, covering both the religious and the secular life. But He had done far more. He had promised and covenanted to be in *Presence* with these people, and this Ark,—the like of which there never was anything in the world, was the sphere or place of the Divine Presence. And more. There *was* a continuity, by hereditary descent, in the office of High Priest; and there was a provision, in the use of the mysterious and jewelled breastplate of Urim and Thummim for the Divine Sovereign to make known His will as to the particular course to be taken in current events.

This system, carried out faithfully, would have done away with the need of any earthly governor or king, or of anything like a modern Parliament. But it required, for its successful carrying out, a constant exercise of Faith in the Unseen;—that mighty principle of which we have seen the operation so often already. But that, alas! though it lay at the very root of their national existence, was only too often wanting.

But when the people, through their elders, made it clear that they were seriously set upon having a permanent govern-

ment in the only shape in which such a government was known in these early days, viz., that of a king; Samuel was very far from advancing the claim of any member of his family. But one thing he did, very naturally, and very like a prophet; *he prayed unto the Lord*. For he saw, plainly enough, what was involved in this idea of a government by a king, (as kings were in those days), viz., a displacement of Jehovah as king,—not by an express and formal repudiation,—for they were far from that, but by forgetfulness, by want of a true appreciation of their position—a people under a Divine government. The answer that Samuel received was perhaps not what he expected: yet it was much in accordance with the methods of Divine administration. Practically the answer was,—“Let them have their own way;—*They have rejected Me*;—(probably there was in the Divine thought rather pity than condemnation),—*but hearken to their voice; Yet protest solemnly to them, and show them what manner of ruler a king will be.*” (v. 7, 8, 9.)

The description of what a king would do, shews clearly that the only conception of a king of those times (and has it not survived to these times also), was of a monarch with absolute power, whose will was supreme, and who had uncontrolled right over the persons and property of his subjects,—and all this without a thought of its being unreasonable, or tyrannical,—that is— in itself— though it might be both in the manner of its exercise.

This, said Samuel, will be the manner of the king that shall reign over you,—He will take your sons, and appoint them for himself for his chariots and his horsemen. And he will appoint him captains over thousands, and captains over fifties, and will set them to reap his harvest; . . . And he will take your daughters to be confectioners, and to be cooks and bakers.” (v. 11 to 13.) There is nothing in all this that sounds alarming to modern ears; on the contrary, it would open to many a community a pleasant prospect of their sons and daughters being well provided for in what we call the public service. Even in democratic communities the ambition to enter the service of the government is one of the commonest and strongest of all aspirations. But it is probable that Samuel meant to convey that a king would seize upon

the persons of those sons and daughters, whether they would or no; and compel them to work without remuneration, reducing them to a condition of vassalage or slavery.

That, undoubtedly, would be a very unpleasant prospect for a free and proud people. And in the old eastern despotisms there was much to justify such a fear.

But what follows is much more explicit: Samuel went on to say:—

He will take your fields, and your vineyards, and your oliveyards, the best of them, and give them to his servants,—and he will take the tenth of your seed, and of your vineyards, and give to his officers and his servants. (v. 14, 15.)

This opens up a prospect of exactions, and seizures without warrant, and confiscations, which was sufficient to set men thinking, and to make them pause and consider,—perhaps, whether it would not be possible to put checks and bounds to the authority of the monarch, as is done in modern times, and most conspicuously in the British Constitution. But nothing of this kind seems to have been thought of,—indeed it required many long generations of oppression, and many risings up in rebellion against it before the constitutional monarchy of modern times was evolved from the turmoil of conflicting forces.

But even such a protest as this was not sufficient to deter the leaders of the people. The current had set in strongly in the direction of having a king; a wave of popular sentiment, as we now call it. Such forces have proved themselves, again and again, all but irresistible in modern times, and they were irresistible then. A king the people would have;—and they would take all the risk of it. *Nay, they said, but we will have a king over us.* And they give a most unsatisfactory reason for it; viz., *that we also may be like all the nations!* (v. 19, 20.) Like other nations? Why, this was the very thing they were *not* to be! God, the Almighty Ruler of all the nations, had designed from the beginning that this nation should be a peculiar and separate people. But human nature constantly asserted itself, and human nature from the time of the Fall has been contrary to the will of God:—*Enmity against Him*, as St. Paul so emphatically expresses it. (Romans viii.) This *root of bitterness* was a constant factor

in the life of the people, and was manifest again and again, in perversity, in stubborn refusal, in idolatries, even down to the time when, as a nation, the Jews rejected the Son of God!

Sorely troubled was now the old leader and Judge; sore forebodings and apprehensions filled his heart, some of which were fulfilled and some not. But, as his duty was, he again laid the matter before the Lord, and was again directed to let them have their own way;—which, when Samuel had announced to the assembly, he dismissed them in the brief words, *Go ye every man unto his city.*

Thus ended the long period of rule without a permanent Chief Magistrate, King, President, or Governor;—yet in which, through Divine Providence, there was raised up a leader whenever great emergencies arose; a system, which, for a people called out as they had been, and watched over as they were, might have continued for many generations longer, and during which men like the great and good kings of after times might have done all that they did for the good of the nation and the glory of God. It is tolerably certain that had this system been continued there would have been no division between the tribes, as under Rehoboam, no ~~destruction~~ of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, with their bitter rivalries and desolating wars, no setting up of idolatry as a recognized system for a large part of the nation; and, almost certainly, no line of wicked rulers, such as was the curse of the kingdom of Israel during many generations.

It is, however, vain to speculate. In the mystery of Divine government the people were allowed to do a foolish thing; and to demonstrate their want of faith in God and appreciation of their own position. The consequence of all this, in the lives of the kings that were to come, are amongst the most interesting portions of the sacred story.

NOTE AS TO THE DOINGS OF THE KINGS.

It does not appear that much of the exaction and oppression indicated by Samuel was actually experienced in the reigns of the kings. At any rate there is not much of that kind recorded. There seems, indeed, during the reign of Solomon, and while his great

public works were being prosecuted, to have been some degree of oppression, but it is distinctly stated in the record (I. Kings ix., 31) that the burden of this heavy work was laid upon the people that were left of the former inhabitants of the land, the Amorites, Hittites and others.

Yet it is to be noted that when Solomon's son ascended the throne, and followed the foolish counsel of the young men of his court, he said to the people who desired that their burdens might be lightened (I. Kings xii.), *My father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions; my father did lade you with a heavy yoke; I will add to your yoke.* What came of all this we know. But it is plain from this that there had been during Solomon's reign a certain amount of what was very like oppression in certain directions, and that this was felt by his own people as well as by the foreigners subject to him.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CALLING OUT OF THE FIRST KING.

(I. Samuel ix., x.)

When Samuel had signified to the people that their determination to have a king should be acceded to, it is very significantly added (Chap. viii.), that he said to them,—*Go ye every man to his city*. There had evidently been assembled what is now called a convention,—a gathering of leading men from the various tribes for the purpose of expressing this determination. In modern times this assembly would not have broken up when they had attained so much of what they desired. They would either have proceeded to nominate and choose a king then and there, or they would have adjourned the assembly to a future day; on the understanding that meanwhile there was to be a search for a suitable man. And they would have appointed a committee for the purpose.

But nothing of this kind took place. It was not the usual method of those times. And, in the case of these people, above all others, such a proceeding would have been impossible. For, though their Divine Ruler was willing so far to allow them to follow their own course in having a permanent earthly ruler, it was still the Divine will that the choice of the man should be with Himself. And so the matter proceeded. The assembly broke up. Every man went to his own city; leaving Samuel, who was a prophet as well as a Judge,—and who was evidently had in high confidence by all the people, to follow the course of events and procure a king for the people. They were satisfied to leave the matter with him; knowing him to be perfectly upright and disinterested as a man (looked at simply on the human side); and also that he knew much of the people.

Thus far as to the people. But Samuel well knew that the choice was not to be with him personally, but with Almighty God.

More than once in the history of the world has the change from a republic to a monarchy taken place; or from a condition in which a number of tribes were held loosely together to one in which, under the guidance of some strong and capable leader, they were welded into one, the strong leader becoming king. But, almost invariably,—perhaps with no exception at all, the strong and capable man was a soldier, a man of genius in war, who had led the nation to oft-repeated victory. Thus Julius Caesar grasped the sceptre at Rome, and was the first of a long line of emperors. Thus Napoleon seized the crown of France, and might also have been the first of a line but for his unbounded ambition and folly in rejecting terms offered him. Thus it was when Washington, the capable soldier, because the first President of the United States; and thus it was in the early days of Saxon England; all which is most natural in the evolution of events. For every government, in the last resort, is an embodiment of *force*; and the man who has shown the highest capacity to wield and use the force of a nation is the one who is marked out by circumstances to be the supreme ruler, by whatever name he may be called.

But no such circumstances existed, at the time the demand for a king was made in Israel. The land had been at peace, apparently, for many years. There was no standing army. No Israelite could properly enter the army of a foreign king, and learn the art of war in his service. Jeroboam did this in the reign of Solomon, but his career throughout was a warning, and not an example. Thus, then, in these later days of Samuel, there had been no opportunity for any man to distinguish himself in war,—as David, not long afterwards, did, by his encounter with Goliath, when the two armies of the Israelites and the Philistines faced each other. But it was precisely a leader capable of taking command in war that the people craved for. And very naturally. *Let us have a king, they said, that can go out before us and fight our battles.* (Chap. viii., 20.)

The man to be chosen as king, then, should have some quality that might develope into military capacity, marking him out as fit to be at the head of the state. And in such a state of society as that of Samuel, physical qualifications

would naturally be of chief consideration. A man of stature, a man of countenance, a man of physical energy and strength would certainly be in favor with the people; and should such a one be chosen for them the choice would doubtless be readily accepted. These preliminary considerations may help to an understanding of the Divine choice of the man who was to be the first king of this people. And let it not be deemed irreverent to endeavor to conceive of *reasons* for Divine action; for in this case, the thing to be done, viz., the calling out of a man for the office of leader, was one that we are competent to form a judgment upon. Of much of the Divine ways, indeed, we are utterly incompetent to judge, as has been repeatedly noted in these studies. The pride of man may, and sometimes does, rebel against a plain statement of limitations to human faculties. But it is not the way of the highest intellects of all to stumble at such limitations. A Socrates of old, and a Newton in these modern times, agreed in the confession that as compared with what might be known they knew nothing; a truth also expressed by St. Paul when speaking by Divine guidance on the same subject. (I. Cor. viii., 2.)

This much men always acknowledge when they think wisely. But as to the matter of choosing a king,—that is well within the sphere of human capacity. In this case, however, the Divine Ruler Himself made the choice for reasons already stated.

Now let us take up the narrative. In the first verse of the ninth chapter we are told, that there was *a man of the tribe of Benjamin*, a farmer or cultivator, as we would now call him; not by any means a prominent man in his tribe, “but a *mighty man of power*,” the reference being evidently to his physical frame,—a powerful and strong man. And at first we might suppose that he would be the chosen man. But no. He was probably well on in years; and would soon be growing unfit for heavy charge and responsibility. But he had a son named Saul; “*a choice young man, and goodly*,”—handsome, and well favored; in fact, *there was not a more handsome man in all the land*. (Chap. ix., 2.) And he was so tall that he stood, as we express it, “head and shoulders”

above the average of the people. A giant in stature, yet not clumsy and ungainly, as such often are; but evidently a man well proportioned and full of activity. Thus the narrative introduces the future king to us; and it is interesting to note the various steps of orderly development by which the choice was made known, first to Samuel, then to the young man himself, and lastly to the whole people. And, again, as in the great sphere of creation, we may mark the workings of a Divine ordination and providence shaping many events to a definite end.

The first step is the sending out of the young man by his father to search for certain asses that had strayed; as commonplace a beginning of a great course of events as history has furnished. The search was fruitless for days. They roamed over a great stretch of country, and on returning came near to the city where Samuel was staying, probably Bethlehem.

Then the servant suggested that the counsel of the prophet should be sought as to where they should search next. Let it be noted, that it was not Saul, but his servant that made the suggestion; just as a *little captive maid* suggested the same thing with regard to the Syrian General Naaman, in the days of Elisha. Thus God works at times by the humblest instruments. The counsel of the servant was followed; and the prophet was sought out and found.

This is the first step, and in this very commonplace way was it that the first of the kings and the last of the line of Judges were brought together. The next step in the unfolding of the narrative is the making known to Samuel of the Divine choice.

The day before Saul came, the Lord had made known to Samuel that on the coming morrow, He would send a man of the tribe of Benjamin to him, whom Samuel should anoint as king. This momentous announcement has one remarkable feature, of which no record has been made before, viz., an indication of danger from the growing power of the Philistines. "*I will send thee a man,*"—thus spake the message,—"*and thou shalt anoint him to be Captain over my people Israel that he may save my people out of the hand of the Philistines.*" (v. 16.) The Philistines had not openly

troubled Israel for years. But they had been consolidating their power and establishing themselves quietly on the frontier, and the Divine eye saw the coming storm, that burst upon Israel when Saul was king. Hence the character of the announcement. The man was to be one who would take the lead of the armed forces of Israel in conflict with the Philistines. Yet the word is not a distinct propaëcy of success in the conflict, for that did not come.

Samuel, therefore, could not but be on the watch for some stranger to appear in the city the next day. And one may imagine what his thoughts would be when this tall and distinguished looking young man appeared before him, all unconscious of the destiny that awaited him.

It hardly needed a Divine intimation, yet a Divine intimation was given,—*Behold the man whom I spake to thee of. This same man shall reign over my people.* (Chap. ix., 17.) Here the announcement is distinctly of a king !

But, in strange contrast to the momentous nature of the announcement, is the simplicity of the enquiry of the young man himself. He is thinking of nothing but the very homely business of finding the lost asses.—And very anxious is he to get home, for he naturally felt that his father would begin to be concerned now for his son more than for the asses. He thus asks for the Seer,—Where is his house,—not knowing who Samuel was, though it was to Samuel he spoke. The two men having been thus brought together, the next step in the narrative transpires, viz., the unfolding to Saul of the great destiny that was in store for him.

Samuel answered Saul,—*I am the Seer*;—and went on to say,—the young man wondering the while,—that he must stay with him that day,—and dine, and that to-morrow he should be told *all that is in his heart*. And to assure him, and make him content to stay, he adds that the asses are found. He then begins, but in a very guarded and indirect manner, breaking the news gradually, as is common enough when any remarkable announcement has to be made,—to hint to Saul of some great career that is before him, "*And on whom,*" he says, "*is all the desire of Israel? Is it not on thee and on all thy father's house?*" (v. 20.) Hearing this the young man, whose thoughts were wholly upon the concern

of his father's farm,—rejoicing at the finding of the asses, thinking of the pleasure his father will have at receiving him home safe and sound;—is almost stunned with astonishment. The idea that he, the son of a farmer, whose thoughts and aspirations (apparently) have never passed beyond the concerns of his father's business; his crops, his flocks, his herds,—and possibly of his own village;—he,—a young man who had never done anything to distinguish himself from the thousands of young men in the land,—that he was to be the one man looked up to by all Israel with hope and expectation,—was beyond belief. And he did not believe it. He seems to have considered the words to be a sort of mockery on the part of the old man,—and answered, practically, Why make a fool of me? *Am I not a Benjamite, of the smallest of the tribes of Israel; and my family the least of all the families of the tribe of Benjamin? Wherefore, then, speakest thou so to me?* (v. 21.)

What the young man says of his family has seemed to some to be inconsistent with what is said of his father in the first verse of the chapter. But consideration must shew that what is said of the father is rather suggestive of his being a powerful man physically than a man of wealth and position. A *mighty man of power*, he is said to be; evidently a man of brawny frame and strong arm; a man who could wield a heavier axe and pull a longer bow than ordinary men; a man of great stature like the son, but not so handsome and well proportioned; all which is quite consistent with his being only a small freeholder of no social status, almost a poor man, and distinguished by nothing except his remarkable physical strength. There are numbers of such men amongst the small farmers of England; to whom the idea of a son of theirs being invested with high rank would be as gross an absurdity as the fancy that they themselves could succeed to the title of the Earl or the Duke under whom they hold the land. Saul's exclamation, then, was both natural and strictly in correspondence with fact.

But is there not more in it than this? There is undoubtedly in it an indication of a modest and humble disposition. From what we know of the Saul of after days it seems difficult to fancy him as a modest and humble minded young man. But

such he undoubtedly was; and his after career is only another of the many illustrations of men being spoiled by being lifted up to rank and power. At this time, as a young man, he speaks most becomingly, even as Moses did when he was called to deliver Israel. *Who am I*, said he, *that I should go to Pharaoh?* thinking of himself as a Bedouin shepherd rather than as a former prince of Egypt;—magnifying his work and belittling himself. Thus also Jeremiah, that eloquent and powerful prophet; *I have ordained thee*, said the Lord, *to be a prophet unto the nations*; a great destiny indeed,—a prophet, not to his own people only, but to the nations! That he was fit for it, the event proved. But what is his estimate of himself? *I cannot speak*,—he cries,—*I am a mere child!* (Jer. i., 5, 6.)

But this is the stamp of man that succeeds;—and for the good reason that he has a high appreciation of *his work!* His depreciation of himself arises from this very thing; he appears small to himself because the work is so large. Thus thinking he bends all his energies to fulfil it.

The young man having partaken of Samuel's hospitality, the two *communed together upon the top of the house*. Then the prophet opened up to Saul somewhat more, but evidently not all, of what he was called to be. And as he rested for the night in the house where Samuel lodged, one may wonder, did this young man sleep? or did he spend the night in restless tossing, wondering more and more at the strange communication of the prophet;—wondering indeed,—as men are apt to do now when some startling accession of fortune is opened up to their view,—whether it is not all a dream! But when morning came, the great reality came fully upon him.

The next and decisive step was now taken. The morning came. Both rose early. They went out. Saul's servant accompanied them. Then, suddenly, Saul was desired to send his servant away. Being then left alone, Samuel said to Saul, *Stand thou still awhile that I may shew thee the word of God.* (v. 27.) It was the WORD OF GOD, in this great matter, that was to be spoken.

The manner in which the word of God was *shewn*: (for it

was as much by the action as by speech), was that Samuel, "*took a vial of oil and poured it upon Saul's head, and kissed him; thus performing upon him that great ceremony of ANOINTING, which has always, from the times of the patriarchs themselves, down to the present, had such a significant meaning in the setting apart to high office.* Thus, down to this very day, the sovereigns of England are set apart, their coronation being distinctly a religious ceremony, and done in the fear of God. But the highest meaning that ever attached to this word on earth was when it was taken to apply to the Divine Son of God, and has ever since been his distinctive appellation. He is the *Christ*. It is hardly needful to say, that the word *Christ* is synonymous with *Anointed*, so that we have as a Saviour, the God-man divinely set apart to his office of *KING* (Psalm ii), and of *PRIEST* (Psalm cx.).

The first priest of the Jewish dispensation was set apart by anointing (Exod. xxix., 7), and so is now the first king. And with the act of consecration came the weighty words; apparently in answer to a startled enquiry, "*Is it not because the Lord hath anointed thee to be Captain over his inheritance?*" (Chap. x., 1.)

Thus, then, is the man chosen out; and set apart. But surely, one may naturally say, something of the nature of preparation will be enjoined upon him, considering the absolute want of experience of the man. And, moreover, what of his acceptance by the people? for he is utterly unknown beyond his own family and city. Most pertinent enquiries; and both are answered in subsequent events.

Following the course of these in Chapter Ten,—we find Saul sent away by Samuel, with explicit directions to follow a certain course of travel, during which certain events would happen as signs, (which all came to pass), at the end of which journey,—at a city on a hill (apparently Mount Tabor) he would meet a company of *prophets* coming towards him bearing instruments of music, and *propheying*;—probably chanting some sacred hymns, which, however, are not recorded in the narrative. He follows the directions. He meets the men. Meeting these he is impelled to mingle with them. Then *the Spirit of the Lord came upon him*. He is

turned in'to another man, and he prophesies also. God is with him, and gives him another heart! (v. 6 to 9.)

A mighty transformation indeed! to turn the erstwhile farmer's son into a *prophet*; to fit him for his work by the power of the Holy Ghost, even as the apostles were endued with power at Pentecost; or as that other wonderful Benjamite of the same name, Saul of Tarsus, was, with equal suddenness, transformed from a persecutor into an apostle.

But now, even as to Saul of Tarsus there was a period of rest and meditation before he openly confessed Christ, so this newly anointed king, his consecration being known to none but himself, is told to go down to Gilgal (Gilgal in Ephraim, let us remember, not the city near Jericho) and there abide quietly *seven days*, until Samuel came to him.

What transpired during that seven days we may imagine. This man, having now "*another heart*," (doubtless the word including a quickened mind also), having *the Spirit of God upon him*—is left quietly to *think*; to think of himself and his own defects; to stir up his faculties and powers to his work, *girding up the loins of his mind*; as the Apostle Peter expresses it;—to think of the people over whom he is to reign, their condition, and the condition of his country; to think also (and surely the Spirit of the Lord would lead him to think of this), of the Law of God, given through Moses and of the direction for wise government given therein, and that the Law should be his meditation by night and by day. Seven days only! Yet, when the Spirit of God fills the soul of a man, he may grow up into fitness as well in seven days, as one may in ordinary circumstances in seven years.

NOTE TO CHAPTER VIII.

ON THE COMPANIES AND SCHOOLS OF THE PROPHETS.

This beginning of the history of Saul is interesting as affording a glimpse of a mode of life and service which has scarcely been manifested as yet in these narratives. Prophets there have been, rising up at times, and delivering the message of God; each one alone. But not until now do we hear of such a thing as a *company* of prophets. Later on in the history, when we come to the times of Elijah and Elisha, we read of *schools* of prophets, evidently companies of young men undergoing instruction, not for the priesthood, but for the prophetic office. But we must not imagine that these

companies or schools were for the purpose of training men to be such prophets as Samuel himself was, or such as Balaam was during the brief interlude when he was filled with the spirit of God, or above all, such as Moses was:—These men were what they were, and so were all the great prophets that came after them, by reason of a special Divine illumination and communications. No school, no training, no preparation, could possibly make men prophets of this character.

What then, may be considered to be the meaning of these references to companies and schools of prophets?

Simply this:—The name prophet, in the Old Testament and the New, was given not only to men of special Divine communication, but also, at times, to men who were the ordinary *teachers* of the people in Divine things.

Let it be borne in mind that there was no office of teaching or preaching connected with the Tabernacle or Temple service. The tabernacle was entirely unfitted for any assembly of the congregation, and so was the Temple proper, though in the courts round about the latter it gradually came about that assemblies for instruction were held. But, and this is one of the most remarkable things about it, there was no provision for *preaching* in the Mosaic ritual. Yet, as religious instruction, or exhortation, or rebuke, were needed, men came to be set apart for the duty. It is such men as these we read of from time to time as exhorting or rebuking or instructing the kings, as Nathan did King David.

CHAPTER IX.

THE RATIFICATION OF SAUL AS KING.

(Chap. x.)

After the momentous transaction of the calling out and anointing of Saul, he seems to have returned home. But some report or other of his meeting with Samuel, and of the singular attentions that Samuel had paid him, had evidently reached his family. For we read that his uncle (v. 14) questioned him as to what had passed; whereupon Saul replied that Samuel had *told him plainly that the asses were found. But of the matter of the kingdom whereof Samuel spoke, he told him not.* (v. 16.) This showed a prudent and self-restrained disposition, for the natural impulse of a man to whom such a wonderful exaltation of rank had been communicated, would be to make it known to his family at once. How could he help being lifted up,—how could he keep such a matter as that to himself; how avoid making it known, at any rate, to his father? That he had no *right* to make it known is certainly the case; for the one person who had that right was Samuel. Until he had spoken, Saul was bound to keep silence. But the power to keep silent when such an astonishing secret was in his possession argues a high degree of self-command. And here we may discern the effect of the working of the Spirit of God; that Divine Spirit who is revealed as the *Spirit of Wisdom and Understanding*, (Isaiah xi.), and of a sound mind. (II. Tim. i.) Of this Spirit, our blessed Master was *full*; and we may notice its working in His silences at critical moments as well as in His words.*

*Needless to say, that the power of keeping silence at a proper time, is one of essential importance and value to any man holding high office in these days; in a Prime Minister, for example, or in the general of an army, or an ambassador, or the head of a great commercial organization.

In the case of Saul his avoidance of self-exaltation and boasting at such a time, are among the most remarkable instances of self-restraint on record. And that this power of self-restraint continued we have further evidence as the narrative proceeds.

The Saul of these early days strikes us so favorably that we cannot but mourn over the terrible falling off of his later life. Well might the Apostle Paul utter the warning *let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall!* Which warning had especial reference to lapses recorded in the Old Testament. To his own converts in Galatia he had to write, "*Ye did run well, who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth!*" (Gal. v.) So with the Christians of Ephesus;—the Spirit of God, speaking by the Apostle John, testified against them, that they had *left their first love*. (Rev. ii.). In fact, was this not true of many Christian congregations in the Roman Empire for many centuries;—a good beginning, but a lamentable falling away as time passed on?—

Well might He, who *knew what was in man*, send forth the expressive warning,—*watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation!*

But the choice of Saul for king was not a matter to be kept secret by Samuel, much as he disliked the idea of kingship.

It was an unpleasant duty for him to make it known. Duty is often unpleasant, nay, it is sometimes painful and distressing to a high degree. But the man who fears God, will go on unswervingly in the line of duty, no matter how much distress it may cause him. So strangely do affairs move in this world of contradictions and vexations that duty, on the whole, is more often an unpleasant than a pleasant thing. And here is the real ground of our Lord's hard saying, "*If any man follow me, let him deny himself daily!*"

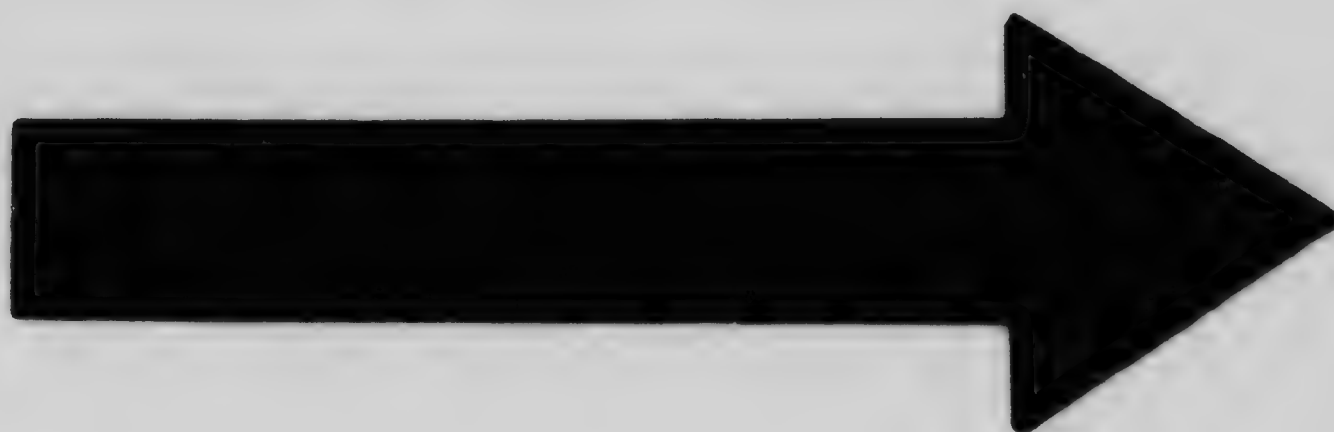
Samuel therefore made proclamation and called the people to Mizpeh. But let us note the solemnity of the summons:—he called them *unto the Lord!* (v. 17.) This matter of a king was no mere secular affair;—in fact, with all the changes

that time has imposed, the proclaiming of a new monarch is not a mere secular function now. It has already been observed that the coronation of the sovereign of England is distinctly a religious function, and has from the beginning been observed in a church, the chief ministrant in the great ceremony being an archbishop.

The people of Israel, then, were summoned to *meet the Lord*; and they had this matter of the proclamation of a king put before them as an act of religion.

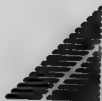
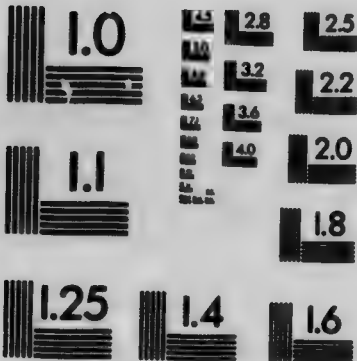
Like a faithful prophet that he was, (and all the good prophets were like him in reminding the people of any wrong-doing), Samuel reminded the people that in desiring a king, they had, in fact, rejected the sovereignty of God over them. Yet he called to their remembrance all the good things that the Lord had done for them; and how he had saved them from tyrants and oppressors;—a matter specially to be borne in mind at a time when a wholly new departure was about to be made, a departure which was *permitted* by their Divine Sovereign, though it was not *approved*. This is a principle of Divine government which has often been apparent, though we may not always see the reason for it. Permission by no means carries approval. In the present case, the thought seems to have been this;—the nation has done *unwisely* in this matter of desiring a king,—and there has been involved in it,—perhaps not consciously and deliberately,—a rejection of the sovereignty of Almighty God,—yet as that sovereignty may be exercised as freely when the supreme magistrate is called king, as when he is called Judge,—it is all-important that they should begin this new condition with a recognition of their relation to Him who had brought them out of slavery and made them a nation. It was in this spirit that Samuel gave the command,—(and every step in this transaction is worthy to be noted),—“Now therefore present yourselves *BEFORE THE LORD by your tribes, and by your thousands.*” This, then, in the immediate presence of the Lord,—the Supreme Sovereign, as it were, looking on,—was this choice to be made known to the nation.

The representatives of the various tribes were caused to appear, one by one, appropriately in the order of size and



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importance. It does not appear that the lot was employed. But one by one, as this tribe and that passed before him, exactly as in the case of the sons of Jesse, some years after, Samuel made it known that this tribe and that was passed by, until last of all, only the little tribe of Benjamin remained. The people then knew that the king to be placed over them was to be a Benjamite. Yet, as has been shown in our study of the dying prediction of Jacob, the line of succession could not continue in Benjamin; it being plainly intimated that the perpetuity of the sceptre must be in the tribe of Judah; (as indeed it became; and as indeed spiritually *it is*, and shall be to the very end of time). Benjamin, then, was to be the tribe. Then came the families. Of these, Matri, an ancestor of Kish, the father of Saul, was taken. Then, coming down to individual persons, (the assembly doubtless waiting with the same tremor of excitement that attends the nomination of a President of the United States, in a convention now), the momentous announcement was made that SAUL, the son of Kish, was chosen to be KING OF ISRAEL.

It has more than once been the case, that, to the astonishment of the whole nation, a comparatively unknown man has been chosen for the great office of President of the United States. And, doubtless, this ancient assembly was similarly astonished. A man of the smallest of the tribes, whom nobody beyond his own family had ever heard of—to be KING!—Incredible!—

Yet, when they saw the man, the most manly man in all the land, the assembly accepted him at once. He was one in the crowd, but when his name was called he suddenly disappeared. There can be no doubt that, naturally, he was a man of singular modesty;—a man of that disposition that shrinks with positive pain from a public appearance. Modern times have furnished abundant instances of this, both in hereditary monarchs and elective, and in men of high rank and position likewise. It is not only in the case of Popes and Bishops that the *Nolo Episcopari* has been said, and with all sincerity, by men who shewed extraordinary capacity for governing, when governing came to be their lot.

Saul had known what his destiny was. And he had had

preparation for it. He was ready to accept it, But he shrank from public display; and so strong was the spirit of modesty and shyness within him that he actually hid himself "*among the stuff*," and had to be sought for when brought out.

But when he appeared among the people, his extraordinary stature and magnificent physique, as he stood head and shoulders above them all, were apparent. And now, with a full-hearted loyalty to the Divine choice, Samuel stands forth, and, pointing to Saul, says to the assembly, "*Behold the man whom the Lord hath chosen*—that there is **NONE LIKE HIM AMONG ALL THE PEOPLE!** (v. 24.)

Then a universal shout of acceptance broke out; and for the first time in recorded history, that grand word was spoken which has embedded itself so deeply in the heart of British people,—**GOD SAVE THE KING!** (The French *Vive le Roi*, however, comes perhaps nearer to the original.)

The king being thus practically crowned, though no such ceremony was actually performed,—Samuel instructed the people *as to the manner of the Kingdom!* What he said is not recorded,—one might wish that it had been;—but doubtless the address was both to the people, inculcating on their part loyalty, obedience, and support; and to the king, charging him above all things to seek the welfare of the people, and not his own aggrandisement; to avoid luxury and idleness on the one hand, and tyranny and oppression on the other.

This address was *written in a book, and laid up before the Lord*, evidently, that it might be for guidance both to the kings and the people of future days.

Thus ended this memorable scene in the history of the Israelitish people, a scene pregnant with possibilities and consequences down to distant ages, such as could not be foreseen at the time. For the developments of the future, both for good and for evil, were amongst the most remarkable that had ever fallen to the lot of any nation in the world.

But the first outward developments of this unique kingdom were of singular simplicity. There was no gathering of a council of elders, no attempt at the appointment of a capital

city as the dwelling place of the king, no consultation as to the building of a palace for him, such as had been common for ages in other kingdoms, (in Egypt, for example), no inauguration at this time with state and ceremony, though there was a great ceremony some time afterwards. After the manifestation to the people, and their acceptance of Saul with shouts of rejoicing, Samuel dismissed the assembly without a word as to their meeting again. *Every man went to his house,—And, it is added, with all simplicity, Saul also went home to Gibeah. He went home.*

But there was one accompaniment of a king which he did have, and this was by Divine appointment, viz., a *band of men* who went with him to his home, *whose hearts God had touched.*

A band,—which suggests some concert, and an incipient military organization,—the beginning of a personal *guard*, such as all monarchs have in attendance upon them; and which is in full survival in those choicest troops of the British army with which the world is familiar,—the Life Guards. And the movement was spontaneous. Saul evidently did not think of it, nor call for it. The men were doubtless for the most part young men, and came together by a common impulse, viz., *that touching of their hearts* by God, which has so often been the origin of great movements in the Church and in the world.

It does not appear that these men continued their organization as a band after they had escorted Saul home. But they doubtless formed the nucleus of the little army which Saul gathered together at a later date, of which we read in the thirteenth chapter.

Although the assembly was most hearty and unanimous in accepting Saul as king, there were not wanting, as is usually the case,—some critics and faultfinders. These are said to have been "*men of Belial.*" The vagabonds and worthless characters *are* to be found in every state, were against him, probably arguing from Saul's appearance that his would be a strong government, and keep such as them in order. Along with these were some men of birth and position, but not of good character, who rebelled against the idea of having

for king a man of such small standing as the son of the farmer Kish. They gave vent to their dissatisfaction in the cynical words, "*How shall this man save us? And they despised him, and brought him no presents:* (v. 27.) This clearly intimates that the majority of the people did bring him presents;—a sign of allegiance and good will on their part which any man in Saul's position would appreciate.

But did Saul not appreciate the conduct of these men who treated him thus?

It would have been according to many traditions if he had taken careful note of them,—had their names recorded and begun his reign by arraigning them as traitors to his government. That would be human nature. And we shall see as the narrative proceeds that many of the people thought so.

But, as has been seen, at this time of Saul's life, he was a man of silence and self-command; a man who could restrain any natural desire to be revenged upon his enemies. Later on in life such a proceeding would have led to a violent outburst of wrath on his part, if not of bitter revenge. But now, as it is significantly said, *he held his peace*:

It is the strong man, who can hold his peace under great provocation. It is a greater triumph still, if he can not only hold his peace but forgive his enemies.

CHAPTER X.

SAUL AS KING AND CAPTAIN.—HE RELIEVES JABESH GILEAD
AND DEFEATS THE AMMONITISH CHIEF.

(I. Samuel xi.)

The time came at length when Saul had an opportunity of displaying his quality and capacity to go out and fight the battles of the people. Yet the occasion found him quietly pursuing his occupation at Gibeah, looking after the herds, either his father's or his own, and, apparently, in no respect leading a different life from that he had been accustomed to before his designation to the kingdom. It is a unique narrative, certainly, and in modern times would be inconceivable. We know that the man holding the great office of President of the United States, though in power and position equal to any monarch of the world while his office lasts, yet returns to his farm or his merchandise when the term has expired. We have all heard, too, the story of Cincinnatus, the great Roman, returning to the plough when his dictatorship had expired, and being called from his farm to deliver Rome again.

But in this narrative we have the man who has been anointed king, and accepted by the people, while actually holding office as king, performing none of its functions; neither holding the semblance of a court, nor organizing his kingdom for administration of justice, nor gathering the rudiments of an army. A strange kingdom, truly, one may say, when the king, while actually king, lives the life of a simple farmer, in no respect different from the farmers about him.

Yet, there is generally a reason for everything, even the most anomalous, and the reason for this probably is to be found in the fact that Samuel still continued to exercise the functions of civil rule throughout the land. One may imagine a similar state of things in a modern country, where

a Chief Justice has been exercising for a long period all the civil attributes of sovereignty. But the time comes when a king is urgently called for, mainly for military reasons. A king is appointed, the great idea being that he shall lead the army to battle. It can easily be understood, that, in such a case, so long as the land is at peace, the Chief Justice will still go on circuit, still administer justice in person or by deputy, still perform the civil functions, and this, too, in his own name, leaving to the king only the care of defending the kingdom should it ever come to be attacked. And although in a modern state, all judges act in the king's name, and all writs of summons are by his authority, yet this condition of things is a growth, an evolution, taking time to attain full development. Thus, then, we need not be surprised at the fact of Saul exercising at this very early stage no civil authority. Yet, for all that, it would have seemed somewhat more conformable to the reason of things if he had separated himself from his former pursuit, and assumed some, at any rate, of the attributes of sovereignty, even in time of peace.

But the occasion was not long in coming when he was called on to do what he was anointed to do, viz., to be the CAPTAIN over the Lord's inheritance. And what he did was remarkable enough.

On the far side of Jordan, stretching away towards the Arabian desert, was the country inhabited by those kindred people, the Ammonites; the same who had troubled Israel in the time of Jephthah. Degenerate in character they were, but warlike and powerful, partaking very much of the Ishmaelitish nature, though they were descendants, not of Ishmael, but of Lot, as were the Moabites, and in the same manner.

Nahash, a powerful chief of these Ammonites, had laid siege to the frontier town of Jabesh-Gilead, beyond Jordan. So threatening had the aspect of things become that the inhabitants were proposing terms of surrender. Terms indeed were offered. But these were so horrible and barbarous—(nothing less than that the chief should *put out all their right eyes*)—that they determined to hold out a week longer,

and send messengers to the newly appointed king for help. For this chief added a sting to his barbarous threat—viz., that if he did put out the right eyes of the men of the city, he would *lay the reproach of it upon Israel*; evidently intending to boast amongst his own people that all Israel could not prevent him.

It was a bitter message they had to bring; and the men of Saul's city, Gibeah, broke out into loud and bitter exclamations when they heard it. Saul was out of the City minding his herd. Hearing the noise and inquiring what it meant;—*they told him the tidings of the men of Jabesh.*

Now then came the test of the man, was he or was he not fit for such an emergency? The men of Belial had said, how can this man save us? Let us see how he stood the test.

The first thing we read is that *the Spirit of God came upon him* when he heard the tidings. The Spirit of God? We in this dispensation, are so accustomed to think of the Divine Comforter solely in His character of a spiritual quickener and sanctifier of the soul, that it is almost with a shock that we read that the same Spirit came to this first Israelitish King in this emergency, rousing him to anger, and quickening him to take strenuous measures of relief. Yet,—what was it that roused Saul to *great* anger, not that this Ammonite had besieged the frontier city, nor that he was likely to take it;—but because of the scandalous barbarity of his terms;—the horrible cruelty he purposed to exercise upon the inhabitants. What—Saul—well say,—what does this barbarian propose to do?—put out the right eyes of all the men of the city?—The Philistines put out Samson's eyes, and dearly did they pay for that piece of barbarism. And dearly shall this Ammonite monster of cruelty pay for what he threatens to do. This is evidently the thought of Saul; and it is plainly the prompting of the Spirit of God, as the working of the Spirit was in the time then present, and under the circumstances then prevailing.

For God is as much the God of retribution, in the government of the world, as He is of mercy to the individual repenting soul. If God is revealed as *loving righteousness*, he is also revealed as *hating iniquity*. He hates cruelty and torture and oppression:—and it is in the order of His govern-

ment of the world that cruelty shall bring retribution:—
Is God unrighteous who taketh vengeance? By no means.
For then how shall God judge the world? (Romans iii.)

This is not in the Old Testament, but in the New. And the whole course of human affairs proves that this is the eternal rule of Divine procedure; more especially in dealing with nations and with the men who deal with the affairs of nations. That this is so is evident from the fact that the wise and thoughtful men of Greece, simply from observation of the course of affairs in the world, and without any light of Divine revelation, came to the same conclusion. But according to their method of imaging out a personality for each phase of the divine character, they assigned the work of retribution to a separate being. The word NEMESIS has become one of the familiar words of language to us, and we constantly use it when speaking of retribution. But Nemesis is simply the expression of the Greek idea of retribution as founded upon observation. But we, in the light of revelation, know that retribution is an attribute of the sovereignty of the great Being whom we both worship and love. But this attribute of retribution has its root in that hatred of wrong doing which draws out the highest regard of the truly wise man—and of all wrong-doing, scarcely any will draw out more intense hatred than wanton cruelty, torture and mutilation.

Do we, in modern times, know anything of such barbarities?

Do we not?

What of the Turkish atrocities in Bulgaria, which moved a great English statesman, a devout Christian, too, to such a passion of indignation, and stirred to anger every right-minded man in Europe? What of the cruelties of the Abyssinian tyrant Theodore, which England was well satisfied to spend millions to put down. When Mr. Gladstone published his passionate remonstrance was there nothing of the working of the Spirit of God in his soul?

Suppose that he, and others like him, and men in authority in Europe generally, had heard the story, and had not been moved:—that they had simply shrugged their shoulders, and passed by—as it were—on the other side? Would such

stoical indifference to horrible cruelty be according to the mind of God? Nay, verily.

But, it may be objected,—observation does not show that when rulers of nations and men in authority commit acts of barbarous cruelty, retribution surely overtakes them. Not always,—it may be granted, and especially, not always at the time. But it is here that another wise saying of the Greek becomes applicable. They saw that judgment sometimes slumbered,—and slumbered long,—as the Divine word tells us it does,—But they had a firm conviction that it would come at last, and they expressed it in the well-known saying, “the mills of the gods grind slowly, but they grind to powder at last.”

Even so the sufferers under cruelty and persecution are represented in the Divine word as crying out;—sometimes in bitter agony, *How long!*

When the Psalmist cried out, in bitterness of soul, *O Lord God, to whom vengeance belongeth—How long shall the wicked triumph?* (Psalm xciv.) he was expressing an eternal truth, a truth that is in force in New Testament times in the sphere of divine government, though its operation is modified by the difference of dispensation.

For the New Testament has revealed with clearness that there is a sphere of judgment beyond the grave. Men may, —and sometimes do,—escape retribution for wrong doing in this life; but there is no escape from the righteous judgments of the eternal world.

Saul's strong and passionate indignation is manifest in the measures he took. “*He took a yoke of oxen and hewed them in pieces and sent them throughout the coasts of Israel,* demanding a muster of all the military force of the land, with a threat that if any fainted, *their oxen should be so treated.* It is noticeable that in this first exercise of his royal power, Saul coupled Samuel's name with his own. The forces were to assemble in the name of *Saul and Samuel.* (v. 7.) Doubtless this was under Divine direction,—and the wisdom of it can easily be seen. And again may be noticed the modesty of Saul's character, in that, although this was a military operation, and therefore peculiar within his own

sphere,—he was willing to have Samuel's name associated with his own. But the actual command of operations was with Saul alone. (v. 11.)

The summons had to be conveyed swiftly, for the city of Jabesh had now less than a week's respite, and it had to be obeyed swiftly,—for otherwise, it was not merely a case of the city being surrendered, but of their brethren being delivered up to horrible torture and mutilation. But its strenuousness was apparent to the people at once. It was received as a Divine summons, as indeed it was. *The fear of the Lord fell upon the people.* The mighty Spirit of God,—the God whose *soul hateth* such deeds of cruelty as were proposed,—this moved the whole people, as well as Saul. They came out swiftly,—with one consent; marching with all speed to the rendezvous, at Bezek,—in the very centre of the land. They were an enormous force; the whole male population of the adjoining Tribes having turned out; making a force very far beyond what was absolutely needful. But the enormous number only demonstrated the strength of the impulse that was upon them. And it was doubtless by the movement of the Spirit of God that such an immense number came. They could thus shew loyalty to their new chief, and strengthen his hands. They could see him, and hear him, and let him see and hear *them*. The people had cried for a king, to lead them to battle. Here then was the king. Every man would now feel as if every man in the land was bound to come and rally round him.

Saul evidently felt mightily encouraged. The throbbing of a king's heart and a general's stirred within him; and he sent the messengers who had come from Jabesh, back with speed to their city, promising help.

The message he sent, like so many other incidents in the Scripture story, has its counterpart in the history of modern times.

Tell the men of Jabesh Gilead, he saith unto them, Tomorrow, by the sun is hot, ye shall have help. (v. 9.)

When General Grant, in the late American civil war, heard that a division of the army, at Chattanooga, some distance away, was in severe straits, and must surrender in a few hours, he sent them a message, exactly like that of Saul.

"Hold out till to-morrow," he said, "and I will be with you." And moving his force with extraordinary rapidity, he was with them on the morrow; and so effectually relieved them that one of the great victories of the war followed.

This incident was the origin of that stirring hymn,
Hold the fort, for I am coming.

Thus also were the forces of Havelock and Colin Campbell moved when hastening to the rescue of the beleagured captives of Cawnpore and Lucknow; Cawnpore furnishing a counterpart in actual reality of similar barbarous cruelty to that which was threatened by the Ammonite chief.

Saul then, from his rendezvous at Bezek, about thirty-five miles distant from Jabesh, had also to move his force with extraordinary rapidity. They marched all night, evidently; for he had promised to be at Jabesh *by the time the sun was hot*. A masterful energy possessed him,—a burning desire to deliver the captives,—the spirit of compassion and of power controlling him. And the whole vast force took their tone from him, and moved as one man. They could move swiftly, for they had no impedimenta, no baggage train, no weak and sickly ones to care for. And they moved for the most part across an open country.

With the true instinct of a military captain Saul had divided his host into three companies. The old formation of right, left and centre, has never ceased to be the form of an army disposed for battle. Probably one of these divisions had been sent forward in advance, the others following in order, the whole arriving before Jabesh about the time of sunrise. And, falling suddenly with overwhelming force, on the Ammonite host, *they slew them until the heat of day*. And it came to pass that they which remained were scattered so that not two of them were left together. (v. 12.) Thus was Jabesh Gilead delivered, and the city never forgot that it was Saul that did it. But not only so; the power of this cruel chief was broken,—his army annihilated, and all border chiefs made to understand that Israel was one people, and that in attacking a single city, they would have to reckon with the whole force of the nation.

But what of Saul? What of the king?

Why,—what could it be for him, but that he was lifted at once to the highest regard and affection of the people? He was the hero of the hour. The hour had come, and the man. Like Nelson, after the Nile, like Wellington, after Salamanca, the people recognized in Saul a real military leader;—the strong and capable man who was well able to lead them to battle and deliver them.

And, as a very natural development, there arose a feeling of bitter anger against the men who had despised him. The soldiers crowded around Samuel. The cry arose; some leading expression to their feelings, "*Who is he that said, Shall Saul reign over us? Bring the men that we may put them to death.*" (v. 12.)

Again was the character of Saul tested; and again did he come victorious out of the trial. "*He that ruleth his own spirit,*" said the wise king—only once removed in succession from Saul himself—" *is greater than he that taketh a city.*" (Proverbs xvi., 32.) And so it proved now. When these men jeered and scorned him as unfit for his post,—he had held his peace. Now that they were in danger from the violence of an indignant multitude, Saul speaks, and speaks decisively:—and with kingly authority, "*There shall not a man be put to death this day!*"

And then he adds, with the modesty of true greatness:—"*The Lord hath wrought 'is day salvation in Israel!*" thus giving glory to Him, to whom all glory is due. *He who giveth strength and power to His people* He is the LORD of Hosts, as it is so frequently expressed by David in his Psalms.

It is much to the credit of many successful captains of England and other countries in modern times that, like Saul they have ascribed the glory of their victories to God also. This was particularly the case with the great Nelson.

After these events, so much was the heart of the nation moved towards Saul, that Samuel determined to have a second public acknowledgment of him as king.

This was done in Gilgal; that city of ancient gatherings and solemnities. There, then, they made Saul king before the Lord, with sacrifices of peace offerings: (v. 15), with mighty rejoicings,—as well became the occasion.

CHAPTER XI.

THE LAST APPEAL OF SAMUEL.

(I. Samuel, Chap xii.)

After the more solemn inauguration of Saul as king, it would seem as if he was at once to assume the function of rule in civil affairs, as well as military, for it is followed immediately by a summons to all Israel from Samuel, to assemble, and hear from him a last address in his character of Judge and Magistrate. This is a very natural sequence of events. He was now an old man; his sons were obviously unfit to be entrusted with such powers as Samuel himself had exercised, though they had evidently been acting as deputies under him. And Saul, after so fine a display of both energy and military capacity, could hardly fail to be the idol of the people. It fell naturally, therefore, that they should look up to him, to exercise the full powers and functions of the sovereign, which clearly involved rule in civil affairs. And so they did. Samuel, though now an *old man and grey headed*, as he describes himself, lived for some time after this;—but his functions were wholly those of a prophet and not of a magistrate. And as a prophet, the people honored and revered him to the day of his death, and accepted his words as the message of Almighty God.

It was doubtless with a view to this continuance in his prophetic office, that he made the striking appeal recorded in this chapter. Still more was it with this view that the remarkable Divine testimony was given him, in answer to his call upon the Lord. By "*signs, and wonders, and divers miracles*" it was, as we read in the Epistle to the Hebrews, (Chap. ii.), that God bore witness to the word that was spoken by His servants in His name. And this chapter proves that the witness was effectual.

Samuel gathers the people together, by their representatives, doubtless;—and after a few words, which practically amount to a resignation of his functions as magistrate,—adds this striking appeal,—“*Behold—here I am:—Witness against me before the Lord; and before His anointed:* the latter being added in view of the magisterial functions now put upon Saul. (v. 3.) The old man thus arraigns himself before the people he has served; puts himself upon his trial; as a modern member of Parliament might do when he goes down to answer to his constituents; or as the leader of a government when persistent and bitter attacks are made upon him, rises in his place to defend himself,

In the case of Samuel there is no *record* of any attacks upon him, any accusations against him. But the absence of record by no means shows that no such things existed. As with the records of our Blessed Lord's life, there were *many other things* done by Him *that were not written in the book*, (John xxi.), so it was in these Old Testament narratives, as is clear from the narratives themselves. For the very form of Samuel's appeal suggests that the tongue of calumny had been busy about him. It would have been a marvel indeed if it had not. The same *men of Belial* who sneered at the choice of Saul for king, would be likely enough, again and again, to distort some of Samuel's judgments into acts of oppression and wrongdoing. Human nature is always consistent with itself. The experience of life in modern times teaches us that every public man must lay his account with slander and detraction at the very least, if not with open accusation of wrong. No purity of motive and life will be a bar against this. In fact, a man of conspicuous purity and honor is certain to make enemies, if he is in a sufficiently high position to have to do with all sorts and conditions of men. Of Joseph as chief ruler at Pharaoh's court, it is recorded that “*the archers shot at him, and sorely grieved him, and hated him*, (Gen. xlix.). An honorable man in public life crosses the ways, and defeats the schemes of the designing and corrupt. Thus it was with Daniel in later times. A true touch of human nature, is the record that when he was raised to the chief presidency, his colleagues *sought to find occasion against him* concerning

the kingdom,—i.e.—in his administration of affairs. (Dan. vi.) That most just and honorable Greek magistrate Aristides, was hated by the “men of Belial” of his time simply because he was just. As to modern history, down to the very days we live in, this hating of just men, and shooting arrows at them;—*even bitter words*, is the commonest of all passing events. And the more freedom of speech, the more do lying and slander abound.

Thus, then, it is very probable that Samuel himself had been “*as a sign to be spoken against.*” There was some color of foundation for slander in the acknowledged fact of his sons being corrupt. How easy, then, for calumny to fasten upon this, and stretch a point so as to include the father also.

But it may be said, why, even if these things were so, should a man like Samuel so strenuously protest his innocence. There is such a thing, as we all know, as “protesting too much,” And the strenuousness of the protest has often only the effect of confirming suspicion. And so subtle is the principle of self-deception in its working at times, even with wise and ordinarily good men, that a public man may protest innocence with all sincerity, when it is patent to all the world that he has been doing wrong. *He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool*, said the wisest of men. (Proverbs xxviii., 26.) Thus there is no safer attitude for a man in judging of himself, than one of self-distrust.

But experience, especially in modern times, shows that an appeal to the public, when the voice of the people can be freely expressed, is sure to bring to light any defect of character, any instance of wrong-doing, any injustice, fraud, or oppression, that the party may at any time have been guilty of. And, although, at such a time, criticism and faultfinding are sure to go beyond the bounds of truth, they often reveal to a man what he never suspected as to his character and conduct. This is conspicuously the case when, under modern systems, a man offers himself as a candidate for Municipal or Parliamentary honors. Then it is that such an appeal as Samuel’s would be severely dealt with. “Have I not always been a just and honorable man?” a candidate may say. “Have I not been a resident amongst you all my life? And which of you can say anything against me?” He may

depend upon it that if, at any time, anything has been said or done, or supposed to be said or done, by the candidate, or, indeed, by his direction, or even by his relations, connections, friends or party, it will then be brought out to his detriment.

It is in the light of these considerations that this appeal of Samuel must be viewed. He was not a candidate for office—far indeed from that. But henceforth he was to be known simply as a prophet of God:—And in that office purity of character, and absolute freedom from reproach in the eyes of the people were essential.

Thus, then, he calls upon the people to speak their minds about him, in all solemnity. *To witness against him before the Lord*; this is the expression, not to witness *for him*;—not to excuse, or palliate, or keep back anything they know. If any “*men of Belial*” are there, and have anything to say, let them speak now; or forever hold their peace.

The king was undoubtedly present; for the witness was to be before the Lord, and before *His anointed*. (v. 3.) It was a sort of court, with the king presiding in person; Samuel appearing, not, as was customary,—as judge, but as one arraigned. His words of appeal, after a brief introduction,—are brief, but pregnant;—Behold, here I am—“*Whose ox have I taken? Whose ass have I taken?*” This form of maladministration is only too well known in that very country at this day, for us to fail to understand his meaning. Let us fancy one of the Turkish Pashas that now bear rule in Palestine, appealing to the cultivators of his district:

Whose ox have I taken?

Whose ass have I taken?

Why,—mine,—and mine,—and mine,—would be the angry reply from many voices. How else is it that you are so rich and we are so poor! Or let us imagine a Publican,—so-called,—of our Lord’s time, convening the people whose taxes he collected, and demanding, “*Whose ass have I taken?*” Whose?—Why, you have taken everything you could get; by force or fraud:—No man’s oxen or asses were safe, so long as you had to do with us.

Of a certainty these would be the replies.

But Samuel went on:—*Whom have I defrauded?*—

Defrauded? Alas! how near the question touches our modern life; and how truly it reveals the inherent sameness of tendency in men, in spite of all changes in race, clime, and age. Three thousand years ago, in a country and state of society, so radically different from ours, the obligations of man to man were violated, sometimes by force, sometimes by fraud; just as they are now. Then, as now, the unjust steward wasted his master's goods,—then, as now, the unjust ruler refused to hear the cry of the poor, because he was bribed by the rich. Samuel's sons, alas,—turned aside after lucre;—*They* took bribes and perverted judgment. It was not without reason, then, that Samuel included *fraud* amongst the charges that might be made against him.

Whom have I oppressed? This is the next question. A form of wrong doing which comes very closely home to a man entrusted with power. And, truly, to exercise power rightly is one of the most difficult of human duties, especially was this the case in the sphere of a magistrate or judge, as magistrates or judges were constituted in early times. For they exercised power without those restraints which in modern times have been devised for the purpose of protecting against its abuse. And thankful we may be to say that nowhere in the world are the safeguards against oppression more completely operative than in Anglo-Saxon communities. The wisdom, and the love of freedom of our fathers, were shown in devising safeguards against oppression centuries before such safeguards were even thought of in other countries. It seems hard to realize that little more than a hundred years ago a man could be arrested in France, imprisoned without trial, and kept in prison for a lifetime, solely by the mandate of the king. The Habeas Corpus Act of England, which rendered such things impossible there, had been in operation for centuries. Nay, we may find cases of like oppression, in the case of Italians immured in Austrian dungeons without trial, down to a period of less than sixty years ago.

But the mode of trial itself has undergone, in Anglo-Saxon communities, no less striking a change. The judge has not now the sole power;—though, at times, owing to the perversity of jurors, one might wish he had. The real trial

is before that remarkable tribuna^l we call a jury;—which consists of men of the same standing in life as the accused. No judge can oppress or tyrannize over any man with this institution to limit his powers. And even when guilt is pronounced the law fixes the penalty, leaving only to the judge the discretion of inflicting one or other of punishments allowed by the law as optional.

But in nearly all the regions of the East, at this very day, justice is administered by a magistrate whose power is almost unlimited. The *Cadi* of the Turkish Empire is well known. A man, he may be, of singular good sense and shrewdness; far wiser than our average jury, and of inflexible justice. Such men there have been. But there have been far more who were capricious or ignorant, or prejudiced. And there have been not a few who were greedy;—and because greedy,—tyrannical, cruel and heartless, “*devouring widows’ houses*,” as the Pharisees did—or trampling on the rights of the suitor without compunction, as did the Unjust Judge; who neither feared God nor man.

The “oppressor” is hardly known in such communities as ours, though the defrauder is. But the oppressor figures largely in Scripture story and poetry. And one of the most striking of the predictions respecting the Messiah is that *he shall break in pieces the oppressor* (Psalm lxii), a prediction that gives the true idea as to the “*rod of iron*,” which he is sometimes prefigured as carrying.

Samuel, then, in challenging any instance of oppression, comes close home to what was the easily-besetting sin of rulers with such powers as his.

The last particular of the challenge is Bribery, *Of whose hand have I received a bribe to blind my eyes therewith?*

And here again, alas!—our modern civilization is closely touched. The bribing of judges, we may be thankful to say, is now almost unknown amongst English-speaking people. But it was known only too well in days not so far distant from our own. The name of one of the very greatest of Englishmen is sullied with the suspicion of it. But in other countries,—to bribe the judge is only too common a procedure even to this day. For wherever there is power, there is a possibility of bribery. And there are many spheres of

modern life, in which bribery—direct or indirect,—is notoriously exercised. Members of the English Parliament are now free from the taint;—but what of other Legislatures? And what of other times?—The millions of voters,—each of these is a centre of power to a limited degree;—and the stringent laws on the subject only show how wide has been the prevalence of bribery with them. Did not Walpole say that “every man had his price.” That was the morality of his day. And at this very time, is it not true that in certain legislative bodies, bills are regularly introduced for the very purpose of threatening certain interests, and necessitating a buying off. What, too, of municipal elections and municipal management? On this continent these have long been the spheres of bribery and fraud in their grossest forms.

In nothing does the legislation Divinely communicated through Moses, display more profound acquaintance with the tendencies of human nature than in its stringent prohibition of this form of wrongdoing.

The final word of this pregnant appeal of Samuel, was the offer of Restitution. “Let any man show that I have taken anything unlawfully from him,” *and I will restore it.* A true principle here that pervades all Mosaic legislation; Wrong should be redressed. If a man confesses wrong and professes repentance, let him make restitution; otherwise there is no repentance at all. And the restitution should be complete. The mere return of the exact sum of money unlawfully taken, is often, when time has elapsed, a very insufficient compensation. The damage that has been suffered should be taken into account. Thus, it was with a true apprehension of the fitness of things that the taxgatherer Zaccheus proposed to return *fourfold* to any from whom he had *taken money by false accusation.* (Luke xix.) For his accusation, and exaction might have ruined them; causing necessity to sacrifice property, break up and possibly abandon, home and country. The mere return of the original sum would in such a case be no true restitution.

But in answer to Samuel’s challenge not a single accuser appeared. The appeal brought out a unanimous vindication: “*Thou hast not defrauded us, nor oppressed us, neither*

hast thou taken ought of any man's hand! It is noticeable that this vindication is again repeated in a form which is exactly equivalent to our oath in a Court of Justice. For this oath is simply a "calling God to witness," a recognition of the Divine Presence as the Supreme Judge and an acknowledgment of responsibility to Him! Even thus did Samuel put the people on their oath, "*The Lord is witness.*" And even thus did the people solemnly swear.

This great transaction is very fitly concluded by a solemn appeal to Almighty God to ratify his position before them as His prophet and servant.

First reminding the people again that their calling for a king had implied a certain casting off of the authority of the Lord who had called them out, redeemed, guided and protected them; he calls upon them henceforth to be faithful and not rebellious,—in which case they could look for blessing. He then calls for a Divine token from the Lord, which was given in the shape of thunder from heaven *in wheat harvest*: at a time when there was no sign of thunder in the sky.

God Himself thus testified to His servant; and as the people feared the Lord;—they were prepared, so long as Samuel lived, to acknowledge him as God's prophet and representative among them.

CHAPTER XII.

THE TURNING POINT IN THE LIFE OF SAUL.

(I. Samuel xiii.)

That the latter part of Saul's life presents a most lamentable contrast to its beginning is only too plain from the course of the narrative. The wretched developments of his character in later days,—his unreasonable anger, his jealousy, his violent outbursts of fury and rapid alternations between one condition of mind and another, are well known to all who have any knowledge of Scripture history. But it is not so generally apprehended how well he began his reign and what admirable traits of character he displayed in the outset of his career. His modesty, his prudence, his self-command, his patience and forbearance with detractors and enemies, are as conspicuous as his energy and capacity in war. And the contrast between the modest and self-possessed man of these early days, and the violent and jealous tyrant that he afterwards became, is such as almost to lead us to doubt whether the man of later years is the same. "*What a falling off was there, my countrymen!*" Shakespeare makes Marc Anthony say, after Caesar's murder. And the "falling off" in the case of Saul was so terrible that we are inclined, in the judgment of charity, to judge that the troubles of his kingdom had sometimes overthrown his reason.

Yet, the case of Saul is by no means the only one of the kind recorded in history. And, quite apart from the greater events of history, degeneration of character, as a consequence of elevation in position is only too common an experience in the ordinary lives of men. Apart from better influences,—it is exactly what might be expected in the working of human nature. For elevation tends to develop pride. Pride leads to jealousy, jealousy to unreasonable anger, anger to tyranny, and tyranny often develops cruelty. And the ordinary life of mankind, day by day, in the sphere of business and govern-

ment, in the development of family life, furnishes only too many illustrations of this. The furious and blood-thirsty Robespierre of the French Revolution, was an amiable and humane man in his earlier days. When the Syrian general, Hazael, had a vision of his future elevation opened to him by the prophet Elisha, did he not start back with horror at the atrocities which it was foretold he was to perpetrate? What, said he, *is thy servant a dog that he should do this thing?* (II. Kings viii., 12.) Wisely, then, is one of the petitions of the Litany of the English Church framed; "*In all time of our wealth,*"—or, as the American Church has it,—"*In all time of our prosperity;—Good Lord, deliver us,*" The truth is, and all experience shows it, NO MAN KNOWS WHAT MAY BE THE CHANGES IN HIS CHARACTER OR HIS CONDUCT, AS THE EXIGENCIES OF LIFE DEVELOPE;—APART FROM THE GRACE OF GOD, RESTRAINING OR DIRECTING HIM.

The striking events of this chapter and the next, though somewhat disjointed, and not easy to follow, (for the story is not related chronologically), yet point out in a few vivid instances, some of the steps of the process of deterioration. But it is evident that little attention has been paid in the narrative to the time that elapsed as one and another event transpired.

It was after Saul found himself fully established on the throne, and in possession of all the authority naturally appertaining to a king, civil as well as military, that a change for the worse became manifest. At no time in life is a man exposed to so much spiritual danger, and has so much need of watchfulness and prayer, as when he has an accession of wealth and power. Thus, with Saul. When thus established, his first step was a mistaken one. He formed what was evidently intended to be a standing army. (v. 2.) Little is said beyond a recollection of the fact of his choosing out three thousand men; evidently out of a much greater number, whom he sent home, and if we follow the narrative closely, we shall conclude this to have been in a time of peace.

This measure was in accordance with the habits of the nations round about; and it might seem to Saul necessary and prudent. But it was neither necessary nor prudent; for like

David's military census of a subsequent day, it had its root in forgetfulness of God; in a want of faith in the Almighty Protector. It was a *trusting in the arm of flesh*, and a *departing from the Lord*. And it brought disaster in its train.

But, it may fairly be asked, is it not evident that the Philistines on the frontier, had for years been perfecting military preparations, massing and drilling their forces, setting their smiths and armorers to work in the manufacture of chariots, and the armor of their drivers and champions, doing, in fact, exactly what the Transvaal Boers did before the war? And was it not prudent in Saul to make preparation, too? Apparently it was. And if the Israelites had been an ordinary nation, it certainly would. But they were not an ordinary nation; but very much the reverse. Their whole existence was founded on a covenant of Almighty protection. That was a far surer reliance than any standing army, however numerous and well disciplined. So in accordance with this great principle, it was commanded in the legislation of Moses, that if at any future time a king should be chosen, he was *not to multiply horses unto himself*, (Deut. xvii.), evidently for military purposes. The whole theory of the defence of the kingdom was that if it was attacked at any time, the counsel and help of the Lord should be first sought, —then that a force should be raised at the time, of such numbers and equipment as might be deemed wise, and according to the Divine will, to repel the attack. In this manner was the attack of the Philistines repulsed so victoriously under the leadership of Samuel. (Chap. vii.) And in the same manner was the force gathered together by which Saul delivered Jabesh-Gilead, and annihilated the host of the Ammonites. (Chap. xi.) And though from a purely military and secular point of view it might seem, and undoubtedly would have been, highly imprudent, to rely wholly on raw levies like these, yet, in the circumstances of the Israelites, it was the height of wisdom and prudence to do it. THEIR TRUE NUCLEUS OF FORCE WAS IN THE PROMISE OF ALMIGHTY GOD. To trust in this was the highest wisdom. To neglect it, supreme folly. And it is here we must look

for the real cause of the disasters recorded in this thirteenth chapter.

How long it was after Saul had organized this standing force before it was put in motion against the Philistines, we cannot tell from the narrative. It may have been months; it may have been years. But what is plainly recorded in the narrative is that it was Saul who began the attack. It does not appear that the Philistines were making any special movement at the time;—or that any part of Saul's kingdom was in danger. It was some years before, that the Philistines had captured an isolated hill fort within the Israelite border (probably on Mount Carmel), but after this they had been quiet. They had made no attempt to advance thence into the interior: and apparently there was no special danger at this particular time to be apprehended from them.

But now it was determined to recapture this hill fort; and for the first time, we hear of that famous young Hebrew, JONATHAN, of whom nothing but good is recorded; and whose romantic friendship for David forms part of the classic of Sacred Story. Indeed, considering the fine traits of character in this young man, his boldness in enterprise, his daring and courage in fight, his capacity for stratagem in war, combined with his generosity, self-sacrifice and stainless honor, one might well wonder why the succession of the kingdom should not have fallen to him. For he was indeed (to speak in modern language), *un chevalier, sans peur et sans reproche*. But the Divine Ruler had willed it otherwise. It is certain, that even if Jonathan had continued the succession for a time, it could not have long continued in his line. For the Sceptre was long ago predestined to the TRIBE OF JUDAH, and that purpose was shortly to be accomplished.

Jonathan captured the hill fort; and thus a war broke out, which lasted many years, and after various alternations only ended with the disastrous defeat on Mount Gilboa, and the death of both Saul and Jonathan. The rapid alternations of this war between complete victory and overwhelming defeat on both sides, are very much like the story of England in the days of King Alfred, when Saxons and Danes contended for dominion in the land, during which the king himself was at one time driven into solitary hiding, and at

another reigning more prosperously than any king that had sat on the Saxon throne. Thus it was with this war in the land of Israel.

The capture of the fort from the Philistines was followed by a general call to arms on the part of Saul. But let us mark, there is no sign of any seeking counsel of the Lord:—*Saul blew the trumpet throughout the land* entirely of his own motion—and, as appears from the sequel, this was a most rash step: a going to war without counting the cost; and considering *whether he was able with his ten thousand to meet those who came against him with twenty thousand*. For the Philistines gathered their forces in overwhelming numbers (though the figure of thirty thousand chariots is plainly a mistranscription, three thousand is most likely the proper number), and swarming over the Israelitish border, captured the stronghold of Micmash, in the interior of the country, producing such a condition of terror that the whole population fled in alarm;—some even as far as over Jordan, while others *hid themselves in caves, and in thickets, and in rocks, and in high places, and even in pits.* (v. 6.) A tremendous disaster, indeed, and calculated to shake the throne of Saul to its very foundations.* Naturally, then, he calls for Samuel. He ought to have consulted him before. His not doing so indicated a condition of self-confidence and pride—the *pride that goes before a fall*.

For some reason, Samuel delayed coming for a whole week:—and what a week was this. A week of *trembling*, even of the soldiers in camp. (v. 7.) What then must it have been on the part of the people! Now upon this delay hung some very important consequences. Saul waited day by day, and had the terrible mortification of seeing these chosen soldiers of his scatter from him until only six hundred were left. When the seventh day came and no Samuel appeared, Saul's impatience burst all bounds. Samuel was to offer sacrifices when he came. He comes not; and Saul

Note.—How like the disaster of Bull Run, in the American Civil War, or that of Colenso in the war with the Boers.

is impelled to do one of the most rash and foolish acts of his chequered life.

All Israelites knew that it was against the law for any person but a priest to offer burnt offerings. Only when there was no priest and no Tabernacle service was this ever permitted. A great king of Judah, Uzziah, in after days, in a moment of pride, transgressed this fundamental ordinance, and was struck with leprosy in consequence. (II. Chron. xxvii.) Saul must have been well aware of this fundamental requirement. But a rash and impatient spirit, tinged with a measure of pride, had now possession of him. The quiet self-possessed young man of former days had degenerated into a rash, proud and impatient king.

It only too often happens that when one is told to wait for an appointment at a certain hour, and the hour comes without the man,—the person receiving the charge going away,—that the one giving the charge appears immediately afterwards. Thus it has been with an officer of a regiment in battle, or the captain of a ship, or the conductor of a railway train, or the servant of a mercantile house. And thus it was with the king of Israel. He had no sooner made an end of offering the burnt offering than Samuel himself appeared.

Saul's excuse is after the manner of all excuses for wrong-doing; a pleading of stress of circumstances. The people were scattering—the Philistines were round about, then, said Saul, I remembered that *I had not made supplication unto the Lord!*

Indeed he was right there. He had forgotten to make supplication to the Lord! But he should have thought of that before he declared war. Had he made supplication to the Lord, there can be no doubt of the answer that would have been given. For *God is ever mindful of His covenant:* The Lord might have given him wisdom and patience, so that he would not have gone to war at all;—for Saul was the aggressor;—or, in case the Philistines made the attack, He might have raised up the spirit of the people, as when Samuel commanded on a former occasion, and worked by signs and wonders for their deliverance. As it was; the expedition being the offspring of pride and self-will, no counsel of the

Lord having been sought, what could be expected but disaster? For this was the very threatening of the Law of Moses. (Deut. xxviii., 25.)

Well, then, does the prophet charge the king with *foolishness*: that kind of foolishness, viz.; which, as is so often emphasized in the Book of Proverbs, has in it, a strong element of sin. He was foolish to undertake the war. He was still more foolish to seek the help of the Lord in the manner he did. Yet he is not the only man who has broken God's command in the very act of praying to Him. Are not those who pray, in these times, through unauthorized mediators, and thus reject the *one Mediator between God and man*, guilty of the same thing, consciously or in ignorance?

The punishment of Saul is that the kingdom is not to be continued with him:—Another is to be appointed Captain over Israel, even in Saul's own lifetime, a point which has, as a rule, not been sufficiently noted. For it was literally fulfilled.

It is in connection with this that we meet with the much-misunderstood, and misused expression, *a man after God's own heart!* *The prophet said to Saul, the Lord hath sought him a man after his own heart; and the Lord hath commanded him to be Captain over his people.* (v. 14.)

We know to whom this pointed. And common reason will tell us that the expression simply indicated that a man was designated who would be faithful where Saul was unfaithful, who would seek counsel of the Lord before entering on warlike enterprises; who would not be lifted up by pride, and trust in his own strength or wisdom, but in the God of the Covenant; moreover, that he would be faithful to God's ordinances and commands as to His priests, sacrifices, and offerings, and not set them aside as Saul had done. All this was eminently true of David. But the saying by no means implied that David was never to fall into sin;—still less does it carry the monstrous assumption, that the scandalous blots upon David's life were pleasing to God.

For nothing contradicts this more plainly than David's own history; and his own psalms of profound penitence.

But the punishment of Saul extended to his people, as is in accordance with universal experience, in all times, countries, and states of civilization. Nothing can prevent a people suffering from bad government, even when they are in no wise to blame for it. Thus, the people suffered terribly through the ravages of *spoilers* who spread themselves over the land from the Philistine camp, in three bands.

And the abject condition of helplessness to which the people were reduced is strikingly shown by the fact that the Philistines were able to go through the land and break up all the shops and tools of the armorers and smiths. (v. 19 to 22.) This was, as is stated, to prevent the Hebrews making any more swords and spears; a cunning device of war, indeed, and very characteristic of warfare in that condition of civilization. The wonder is that they did not surround Saul in his stronghold and kill or take him prisoner, along with Jonathan.

But for some reason they did not,—Possibly they could not. The consequences of their not doing so were as remarkable as anything recorded in history, as we shall see in the next chapter.

CRITICAL NOTE TO THIS CHAPTER.

From a literary point of view, the thirteenth chapter of this first book of Samuel is a singularly disjointed one, and especially as to the rapid changes that are sketched or indicated in it, without a word of the intervening circumstances that make the narrative connected and reasonable. Like some other parts of the Sacred Word, it is more like a series of jottings or short memoranda made on the spot and at the time, in the journal of a partaker in the events, than the finished narrative of a scribe or man of letters, written afterwards. Much of the writings of Moses is of this character, too; and very naturally. He was a man of action, a ruler, a leader, a man with large secular responsibilities and duties, after leaving Egypt. But during his long life as a shepherd he had ample leisure to write, and we find accordingly in the Book of Genesis, carefully composed and finished narratives. So with the earlier part of Exodus. But from the time of the encampment before Sinai, and all along to the end, the narrative as a rule is much more like the rapid jottings of a man of affairs; just, in fact, as might be expected in the circumstances. If, as is most probable, this first book of Samuel was mostly written by Samuel himself, this would account for the hasty and disjointed style of much of the narrative in the chapter now commented on.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE EXPLOIT OF JONATHAN AND THE TURNING OF EVENTS IN FAVOR OF ISRAEL.

(Chapter. xiv.)

The condition of abject helplessness and subjection under the Philistine yoke, referred to in a previous chapter, most probably lasted some time,—how long the narrative does not indicate. But it was at length broken up and the tide turned, in as sudden and singular a manner as any event recorded in either ancient or modern warfare. The exploit of Jonathan and his armour-bearer—(a young man, his name not recorded,—though it deserved to be) was one of those, which if it had been told in secular history,—say by Thucydides or Livy, would have immortalized them both. There were deeds of *derring do*, of the same kind, in the armies of Greece and Rome, such for example, as that of the Horatii:—

—*Who kept the bridge,*

In the brave days of old.

and some of the things done by the soldiers both of Wellington and Napoleon,—the latter particularly—were almost as striking. But for cool, and almost impudent daring in attempting, and for subsequent courage in fight, this feat of Jonathan's will rank with the most remarkable of them. But let us note: (and here the narrative before us has a different element from these others), that this wresting of a strong fort from the Philistines by only two men was done in the power of faith in God. Jonathan, like David after him, was a man who had grasped the mighty truth that *with God all things are possible*. David, a much younger man than Jonathan, conquered Goliath solely because he went out in the name of the God of Israel; rejecting ordinary armor and employing only the weapons of a shepherd.

Napoleon's ruling the word *impossible* out of his military vocabulary, was nothing but braggadocio,—as the events

proved. But it is an absolute truth that *all things are possible with God* ! And it was a right application of this truth that Jonathan made when he said to his armour-bearer, *There is no restraint to the Lord to save by many or by few.* (v. 6.)

This spirit of confidence in Divine power was in full accord with the national constitution of the Hebrews. Jonathan doubtless well knew that in the Divine Covenant with Israel there was the promise of success in war, even though the odds were enormously against them. *They shall come out against thee one way, and flee before thee seven ways,* was the Covenant. (Deut. xxviii.) *One of you shall chase a thousand* (Deut. xxxii.), was only a highly poetical way of saying the same thing.

The directions as to going out to battle (in Deut. xx.), breathe the same spirit, as also the word repeatedly spoken to Joshua, *be strong and of a good courage*: Then, in addition, there was the striking example of Gideon, and his victory with three hundred over the vast host of the Midianites.

Jonathan, then, was not a mere dare-devil, nor a foolish braggart, in crossing the valley and going over to the fort of Michmash. What he did was in all soberness and reasonable confidence. But why, it may be asked,—did he not take more men with him? There were six hundred of them in Gibeah with Saul; on the opposite hill. Why not take half of them, at any rate?

There were several good reasons why he should not. Saul himself, and his men also, were discouraged and cast down at the wretched condition of the kingdom. And the law of Moses forbade the taking of such men to war. (Deut. xx.)

But, besides,—it would have been very undesirable to weaken the fort of Gibes' when the Philistines were in such strength round about it.

Jonathan, therefore, kept his enterprise a secret, He told not even his father; and none of the garrison knew.

The reception of the two men by the Philistines was derisive:—*Come up to us*, said they to Jonathan and his companion,—who were down far below in the pass beneath, as men might be standing looking up at the ramparts of Edinburgh Castle—or at the frowning walls of Quebec from

the river. *Come up*, said they,—if you can—and if you can climb up,—*we will shew you something*:—never dreaming that the men below would be foolhardy enough to make the attempt.

But these words,—*Come up*, had been agreed on before, plainly under Divine guidance,—as the signal, if the men in the garrison used them, to make the attempt. The narrative proceeds, therefore; *Jonathan climbed up upon his hands and his feet, and his armor-bearer after him.* (v. 13.) Then the two made a bold and sudden attack,—an utterly unexpected attack,—for probably the men who guarded the entrance had laid their arms aside in secure confidence that to climb up was impossible. There were about twenty of them in all, and so completely dazed were they with this sudden onset that they were cut off to a man.

The panic that seized the rest of the Philistine garrison was exactly such as has occurred with many an army of raw levies in these modern times. There was a *trembling* in the fort, and in the camp outside. And to add to the alarm, there was a shock of an earthquake at the time, a natural thing in itself, like most of the phenomena of nature that served to help the cause of the Israelites, though divinely ordered as to time.

It has been noted as a principle with regard to these extraordinary interpositions, that they are never put forth unless to answer some great purpose, and when ordinary means would be insufficient or unavailing;—and often in answer to prayer. Was the present, then, a time, when an extraordinary interposition might be looked for? Was there a great end to be accomplished at a time when ordinary means would be insufficient, and when the help of God was being distinctly looked for?

Certainly.

Every one of these three conditions was present. The great end to be accomplished was the deliverance of the land from the grinding tyranny of the Philistines; for it is evident that the military occupation of the land was accompanied by as grinding a tyranny as that suffered by Spain under Napoleon, or Saxon England under the Danes in the time of Alfred. And ordinary means would have been

unavailing; for the military force of the Israelites was for the time almost annihilated. The bulk of the people had no proper warlike weapons. They had been deprived of them and of the means of making them, by the cunning craft of their enemies. And the king, warlike and energetic though he was, was barely able to hold his miserable remnant of a force together in the stronghold of Gibeah. This wretched state of helplessness came about, as has been shown in a former chapter, through the king's forsaking the commands and law of God.

Disaster had come by disobedience, and it was so absolute, that, as we often express ourselves now, "nothing but a miracle" could save the country from destruction.

Now what we say figuratively, could be said, in those times and circumstances, literally. Nothing but a miracle *could* save them. None but God could help them. Man's extremity has been said to be God's opportunity,—and the fact of this being a proverb shows that it has often happened. And there never was a time in the early history of these Jews when the extremity was so absolute.

The third condition was present also, viz.; a looking to God alone for help.

Jonathan, with a true soldier's instinct, had realized that to attempt to overthrow the Philistine power by ordinary means would be worse than useless. Nothing but an attempt of an extraordinary kind, a bold and daring *coup*, relying on Divine help, as Gideon had done, would be suitable to the emergency. So he took his life in his hand, and his armor-bearer his, too; and these two men alone made the attempt to take the Philistine fort, God being with them. And the signal agreed upon was well chosen. Divine power always works by well-chosen methods, even in enterprises that seem the extremity of rashness. For if the Philistines said, come up here, it would indicate an easy confidence, a sense of perfect security,—and a probable laying aside of ordinary precautions, giving just the opportunity that a couple of daring men desired.

And this was exactly what happened. God was with these men; first in inspiring them with courage, next in striking the Philistines with panic, and last in bringing about

an earthquake, so that the panic spread far and wide beyond the limits of the stronghold,—filling the whole Philistine host with alarm; so that they fell upon one another. The time chosen for this affair of Jonathan was probably about sunset. Darkness soon coming on; the men in the fort could not see whether there were not more enemies behind, and could not distinguish friend from foe; and exactly as it was in the case of the Midianites, the slaughter was by the Philistines *beating down one another*. (v. 16.)

And now, for the first time during many years, we hear again of the ARK OF GOD, which had evidently for safety been removed to the stronghold where Saul was. To think of the Ark of God meant, doubtless, a return of confidence in Divine protection,—and an appeal for Divine help. Under its aegis Saul gathered his little remnant of a host together and attacked the disordered host of the Philistines with such effect—that the panic was intensified. Every man's sword was turned against his fellow, and there was a great discomfiture. Then certain Hebrews who had been pressed unwillingly into the military service of the Philistines, turned their swords against them. And, very naturally, the people that had hid themselves in the caves and thickets round about, came out and joined in the attack with such weapons as they had secreted. Once the tide of battle had turned,—as is generally the case, it flowed on to complete victory. There was a general uprising of the Hebrew people, and a rush of the Philistines to get over the border down to their own country, the soldiers of Saul smiting them as they fled, all the way *from Michmash to Ajalon*, even as the Prussians pursued Napoleon's army after Waterloo.

THUS THE LORD SAVED ISRAEL THAT DAY.—And as the glory was His—the glory to Him was given!

But the glorious result was marked by a piece of rash and fanatical folly on the part of Saul, such as, in truth, not seldom follows a plain breach of the commandments of God. The weakness of human nature is often exemplified in this swinging of the pendulum of action, altogether beyond the bounds of God's commands, in the other direction.

In the midst of the excitement of the pursuit, Saul uttered

a malediction that was contrary to the plainest dictates of common sense. It was as rash as the vow of Jephthah. No army can fight without food. But Saul uttered a solemn curse against any man that tasted food until evening. The purport of it was reasonable enough, viz.; that the soldiers should not be detained by sitting down to a formal meal. But the manner in which the charge was carried out was fanatical, and the result, like that of Jephthah's vow, is a warning against rash maledictions, and promises. For it so happened, that Jonathan had not heard this curse pronounced. And being in hot pursuit, he stayed a moment to gather wild honey.

Now, at the close of the day, Saul, having,—very properly,—relented, the people, who were so ravenous after food that they *flew upon the spoil*, and devoured flesh *with the blood*, i.e., devoured it raw, hastily built an altar to the Lord,—for the priest of God was present.

Then he asked counsel of God whether he should continue the pursuit in the night; and receiving no immediate answer, concluded that some sin had been committed, and summoned the chiefs of the people, to a trial by lot; declaring—in his rashness and folly, "*As the Lord liveth which saveth Israel, though it be Jonathan my son, he shall surely die!*" (v. 39.)

This rash declaration of the king was, however, followed by an ominous silence on the part of the people. Even in that hour of victory and excitement, the sound judgment of the host was utterly against the king. And when the lot fell upon Jonathan, there was such an outburst of loyal affection to this, the hero of the day, that the king dare not execute his foul purpose. The narrative is very vivid:—*Tell me what thou hast done*, said the king to his son,—*And Jonathan told him, and said, I did but taste a little honey with the end of the rod that was in my hand, and lo! I must die.* (v. 43.) And Saul answered; a strange madness of infatuation having come over him, making him deaf alike to the dictates of reason and to the pleading remonstrance of his son, "*God do so, and more also, for thou shalt surely die, Jonathan!*" (v. 44.)

It is difficult to believe that the king could be in earnest:—Yet, judging from his subsequent history, one may well

imagine that a moody jealousy, even of his own brave son, had begun to work in his soul. Very possibly he may have imagined that it was to Jonathan the prophet referred when speaking of a man after God's own heart being chosen to be captain instead of himself. And we well know that jealousy is a passion that rises and sweeps away in its baleful influence all ties of blood and kindred and natural affection. Some of the most terrible tragedies of history have been between father and son, and this narrative, unnatural as it may at first sight appear, is perfectly conformable to the developments of human nature, as we know it by experience.

But if Saul was purposed to sacrifice Jonathan, the soldiers of his army were determined that he should not. They arose in wrath, and said to the king, *Shall Jonathan die who hath wrought this salvation in Israel? God forbid! As the Lord liveth there shall not one hair of his head fall to the ground, for he hath wrought with God this day!* (v. 45.) So then, as the narrative states, *the people rescued Jonathan*, language which implies that he had already been put under guard, and probably bound. But the army was not to be trifled with. Had the king resisted seriously, there can be no doubt that his own life would have been in danger. The tide of passionate resistance to cruelty and injustice had risen so high that it would have swept away the king himself.

Very many incidents in Scripture have been singularly like the events of modern history (a circumstance by the way, which proves them to be no myths, but real occurrences). The message sent by Saul to Jabesh Gilead was such a one as has been seen. And this incident of Jonathan's rescue strikingly reminds us of the old Cornish ballad,

And shall Trelawnay die?
But must Trelawnay die?
Then forty thousand Cornishmen,
Will know the reason why!

The king, with all his moody folly, was wise enough to bow before the storm. And Jonathan lived to be the hero of a most romantic, yet most real, story of friendly affection with his father's successor, David.

This turn in the tide of the affairs of Israel, when it once set in, flowed on with extraordinary force and rapidity. The Philistines were driven back over the frontier. And, as time went on, the assaults that were made by other old-time enemies of Israel were repulsed. For it would seem, and most naturally, that the Moabites, Edomites, and other adjoining nations, had taken advantage of the weakness to which the kingdom had been reduced, to make raids and incursions of spoliation upon Israel. But now the king was able to *turn himself*, as the narrative expresses it, *and vex them*. Particularly was this the case with the roving bands of Amalekites that inhabited the desert country of the South. These were the most difficult neighbors that the Israelites had to deal with, and it is evident that bands of these denizens of the desert had swarmed over the southern border, and *spoiled* the inhabitants of the adjoining territories of Judah and Simeon. To deal with these fierce and lawless hordes the king had found it necessary to organize a special force. *He gathered an host* for the purpose, *and smote them*. (v. 48.) But one smiting produced little effect on wandering tribes like these, who, dwelling in tents; with their swift camels and asses, could appear and disappear with a celerity almost magical.

But the story of Saul's dealings with these tribes must be reserved for another chapter.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE EXPEDITION AGAINST THE TRIBES OF AMALEK AND ITS CONSEQUENCES.

(I. Samuel xv.)

The previous chapter summarises in a single verse an account of this expedition against the Amalekite tribes. But as is the manner of many chronicles, both ancient and modern, there is given in this subsequent chapter a full and detailed narrative of the same event. And certainly the narrative is a remarkable one, opening up, as it does, some of the profoundest questions as to the Divine procedure in the government of nations, as well as the operation of great principles as to the conduct of individual men. The former were more or less of a temporary character, arising out of the peculiar conditions of the time then present; the latter are such as abide for all time, and are independent of any considerations of age and dispensation.

It is evident that the borders of the land of Israel had been sorely harassed by the plundering incursions of these Amalekite tribes, who, in some respects, resembled closely some of the tribes of Bedouin Arabs that inhabit the same country to this day, in that they were dwellers in tents, accounting plunder a lawful occupation, never hesitating at killing those who resisted them, and being utterly destitute of compassion for helpless children. The latter feature was one they shared with the Turks of the present day, whose atrocities in Bulgaria in this very respect within living memory, aroused the indignation of Europe. For the special feature of these atrocities was the torture and mutilation of *children*. That this was a special feature in the doings of these Amalekite tribes is evident from the words of Samuel to Agag, their king, or chief, "*Thy sword*," said he, when passing sentence of death upon him, "*hath made women childless*; clearly

pointing to the killing of children, as one distinguishing feature of his raids upon the land of Israel.

We know from the chronicles of the incursions of the Danes into England, that this torture of children by impaling them on the point of their spears was a common enough practice with these barbarian hordes.

These northmen or vikings, for generations were the terror of the more civilized states of northern Europe, and a study of their incursions and doings throws much light on the Scripture chronicle. A recent English historian, referring to them, says, "Without a yard of territorial property, without any towns, or visible symbol of nationality, with no wealth but their ships, no force but their crews; and no hope but from their swords, the sea-kings swarmed on the boisterous ocean, and plundered in every district they could approach. Never to sleep under a smoky roof, nor to indulge in a cheerful cup over a hearth, were the boast of these watery sovereigns, who flourished on the plunder of the sea and its shores, and sometimes penetrated far inland and dominated the country." To ravage, kill, burn, and destroy,—this was what the incursions of the Danes meant to the England of the time. "When they penetrated into the interior, women were ravished and murdered; and no age, sex, or quality was secure from the wantonness of their barbarity." Upon these points all the chronicles agree.

Now, what these Northern pirates were to England, that the Amalekites were to Israel. They were pirates by land, as the others by sea. They moved swiftly from place to place by their camels and fleet asses, exactly as the Danes did by their ships. (I. Samuel xxx., 17.) It was never known where they might attack next. And any expedition sent out against any of them might pass over great tracts of desert country without finding them. But wherever they appeared it was a matter of desolation, ravaging and murder to the unfortunate people of the country.

But we need not in this country go to the distant ages of English or any other history to learn what kind of life the people lived who had such neighbors as these Amalekites on their borders. The early settlers of this continent, had exactly the same experience with the Indian tribes around

them. These settlers of our own country corresponded exactly to the Israelites in that they were an orderly community, having laws, a constitution, and settled government,—and being devoted almost wholly to the pursuits of agriculture. But all around them were savage tribes, whose whole idea of war was of ravaging, and plundering; torturing of captives and killing of children. The annals of many New England counties are full of atrocities committed by the Indian barbarians, who arranged warlike raids in secret, burst upon quiet villages like a tornado, killed men, women and children indiscriminately, or carried off the men to be tortured, and made their way to the recesses of their own forests before anything could be done in the way of resistance.

Consideration of such occurrences may help us to understand some of the severe commands given to the Israelites with regard to the marauding tribes around them. Let us firmly fix in our minds that there is on the one side, a nation of peaceable and orderly agricultural people, occupied with their farms, their flocks and their herds,—and the bringing up of their children—and on the other side around them, especially on the south and east, warlike tribes whose propensities for plunder and murder were hereditary and ineradicable.

Bearing this in mind, let us consider the narrative of this chapter. The prophet commands Saul, in the name of the Lord, to *go and smite Amalek; and utterly destroy all that they have; sparing nothing; but slaying both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass.* A terrible command it seems to be.

Saul obeys readily, and naturally, gathers a force, and passes over to the desert country. But he finds there some of those Kenites of whom we have heard before, as having relationship with Israel. These he warns to remove from the camp of the Amalekites, lest they should be destroyed with them.

Then Saul made his assault, and carried the war successfully over a wide extent of desert country to the East and the South, utterly destroying the Amalekites wherever he could find them. But that he did not find them all is evident

from a subsequent chapter. And it is not very likely that he could.

But he spared the life of the king; whom he took prisoner. He and the people—for the people are joined with him in the narrative) also spared *the best of the sheep, oxen and fallings*, only destroying what was poor and refuse. (v. 9.) He then, with the king as prisoner, and all this valuable spoil, passes on to Gilgal, in the Jordan valley (there were two places of that name, as there were also two places called Carmel), Gilgal being an ancient place of sacrifice. There he meets Samuel, and goes up to the prophet, confidently, saying, *I have performed the commandment of the Lord.* (v. 18.)

(This command, let us note, was to spare nothing, and destroy everything.)

Apparently he expected congratulation: but, instead, he meets this severe reproof, *When thou wast little in thine own eyes, wast thou not made the head of the tribes of Israel? And the Lord sent thee on an expedition against the sinners, the Amalekites, with a command to utterly destroy them. Wherefore, then, didst thou not obey, but didst fly upon the spoil, and do evil in the sight of the Lord?*

Saul excuses himself;—declares (in his foolish conceit), that he *has* obeyed the voice of the Lord; but has thought best to bring away the king captive; Also, he says, *the people*—not himself, but the people—took the best of the spoil to sacrifice unto the Lord in Gilgal. (v. 15.)

Then, says Samuel, speaking in God's name, and with all solemnity, and affirming a great principle, *Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord?* BEHOLD, TO OBEY IS BETTER THAN SACRIFICE, AND TO HEARKEN THAN THE FAT OF RAMS. (v. 22.)

Then Samuel went on, opening up in plain terms the sin of Saul:—What was it? Self-will as against God's will. It was, in short—*rebellion*—it was the stubbornness of pride. And, further, he announced, in plainer terms than before, that Saul was rejected from the kingdom, and that the sentence was unalterable;—using the same words that were put by the Spirit of God into the mouth of Balaam, long before, in a more striking form. *The strength of Israel,*

said he, *will not lie nor repent*;—the word used, and translated *Strength* signifies also, as we read in the margin,—the ETERNITY—or the VICTORY—of Israel, and being evidently designed to raise up the mind of Saul to a conception of the majesty, the power, and the unchangeableness of the great God whose command he had trifled with. But on the earnest pleading of Saul not to be dishonored before his own subjects, accompanied by confession of sin, Samuel consented to remain in his company until he had worshipped the Lord. But Samuel, once more, and for the last time, assuming the office of Judge, (and showing a certain distrust of Saul in the matter), commanded the Amalekite chief to be brought before him for execution. And executed he was, with the words, "*As thy sword hath made women childless, so shall thy mother be childless among women*" Whether Samuel slew this cruel chief with his own hand, or by the hand of another, does not matter to the substance of the narrative. He was put to death, before the Lord, a Divine sentence being executed upon him, mainly for his barbarities to children.

This, then, is the narrative. And upon these facts, many reflections may arise.

And first, as to the command to utterly destroy the Amalekites, men, women and children, and to destroy all their cattle also.

Men have said that this is horrible and barbarous, worthy of a malignant tyrant rather than a just and benevolent being such as God is revealed to be. But let us consider. What sort of people were these Amalekites? That has already been opened up. The question is, then, whether the Supreme Ruler of the world, in his course of government over the nations, might not see it to be a righteous judgment upon these barbarous tribes for their villainies and cruelties, to have them rooted out from the earth. That the Israelitish people were instruments of righteous retribution upon the wicked nations of Canaan is clear from the only narrative which tells us about it. And this narrative is one of precisely the same kind. God Almighty, the ruler of nations, had pronounced sentence of death upon these marauders for their

cruelties and robberies, and Saul was commanded to execute it. Is it horrible and cruel and barbarous to exterminate the tigers of the jungle? And are these not human tigers? Let history, even of our own times, say of the Indian Mutiny, of Nana Sahib,—nay, of the Mahdi, whose power has been broken at this very time of writing, answer that question.

If one of these faultfinders had had his house fired, his property destroyed, his children murdered, his wife ravished, by bands of marauding Indians, as the settlers of New England had in former days, he would be able to judge better of what was right to be done with such marauders as these Amalekites.

Let us suppose the command to have been given to Saul to drive these Amalekites out of the Israelitish country. Could fault be found with that? And if he had been commanded to follow them into the desert, making war upon them, and breaking up their power for mischief? Would that have been a barbarous and cruel proceeding, even if numbers of Amalekite warriors were slain in the process? No reasonable man could say that it was. But if all the men of the Amalekites were warriors, as the men of an Indian tribe would be,—and all were accustomed, invariably in war, neither to give nor to take quarter, then all the men would be slain;—Would that be beyond the bounds of lawful warfare? Not with such people and under such circumstances. But in what does the command given to Saul differ from this, so far as the men are concerned? It does not differ, practically, at all, so far as the men are concerned. But the burden of objection, it may be rejoined, lies against the command to destroy the women and children. This does seem, at first sight, barbarous and cruel. But can we judge, at this distance of time, and with such a brief narrative before us, as to what the necessity of the case was. This command is said to have been given by the Lord of the whole earth, the Creator and Preserver and Ruler of all life. Now, He is declared, again and again, in the same revelation that tells of this command to destroy the Amalekites, to be a just, a righteous, and benevolent Being. Can we, in this age, and at this distance of time, conclude with any show of reason that this command proves Him not to be just and benevolent? We

cannot. In the ultimate issue it must be concluded that He has the right to take life away,—as He does by ordinary agencies day by day. *Thou turnest man to destruction,* says the Psalmist. (Psalm xc.) A profound and philosophic truth as to the end of this life for every man.

But without seeking to penetrate so far into the deep mysteries of the Divine government, let us consider this destruction of women and children from a human point of view. The killing of the men has taken place as an incident of war. What, then, is to be done with the women? They must die of starvation now that the men are no longer there, if left in the desert. Are they, then, to be brought into the land of Israel? What would be the effect of bringing a crowd of half-savage heathen women into a community like the Israelites? We have seen before how utterly contaminating was the contact of Israel with the women of Moab;—much worse would it be with these women of Amalek. A regard for the purity of the race of Israel would forbid the bringing of the women into the land, even as household slaves;—while to leave them in the desert would be to leave them and their children to die by the most horrible of deaths, starvation. It was mercy, then, to put them to death with the sword. And what applies to the women, applies still more forcibly to the children. These were the stern necessities of *warfare* with the tribes of the desert; and must be judged of as such.

Still—after all, in the ultimate resort, we must fall back on the idea that the all-wise and perfectly just Ruler of all races of mankind must have done rightly in the command He gave. And, to strengthen this confidence, we may look at the analogy of the working of the natural forces of the world. While these are full to overflowing of the evidences, not only of marvellous wisdom, but of good-will; of benevolence, of arrangements in a thousand forms, to promote the happiness of all creatures,—there are also on the other hand, evidence of the working of terrible forces of destructiveness. Fire will burn as well as warm, water will drown as well as quench thirst, rivers that are the life of the regions they traverse will overflow and destroy thousands of lives, earthquakes throw down cities, and slay men, women and children alike. Who

that witnessed the destruction of Herculaneum and Pompeii but must have been struck with awe at the tremendous forces of death that lay hidden in the recesses of the adjoining mountain; death, not of soldiers in battle, but of peaceable citizens, in thousands, with their wives, their children, their houses, their cattle and all they had in the world.

The judgments of God are declared to be *a mighty deep*. (Psalm xxxvi.), a profound and unsearchable mystery. (Romans xi., 33.) But are not the ways of Nature—(to use a bold personification), a profound and awful mystery, too? Men may cavil and speculate and pass judgment, and find fault. But we must come out at last, in some cases, to silence and submission. And the event of this chapter is one of them. He who ordered and controlled the forces of nature so as to destroy men, women and children in Herculaneum, ordered and controlled other forces for the destruction of these Amalekites.

We are sure, in spite of all earthquakes and eruptions that the God of Nature is supremely good. So, likewise, we may be sure that the God who ordered vengeance to be taken upon Amalek is supremely just.

But why order the destruction of the cattle? There were reasons, doubtless, and it concerns us very little to know what they were. But it may have been that it would have been disastrous to a people of industrial pursuits to bring to them great quantities of the spoils of war. It would seem to degrade the Israelites to the level of the Amalekites,—and take away altogether the retributive and punitive nature of the enterprise, to allow Saul and his people to be enriched by the spoil of the Amalekites, just as these Amalekites were accustomed to enrich themselves by plundering the Israelites.

The reason for killing the cattle is not given. But there undoubtedly *was* a reason, and this probably comes as near to it as any conjecture that can be made.

But why should Saul's sparing the sheep and cattle, and bringing them, along with the king, into his own country,

have been judged so severely, that it was followed by the loss of his kingdom?

The narrative makes this plain. It was because he disobeyed a plain and distinct command, and obeyed the instincts of his own judgment in opposition to the will of God. The prophet called this an act of *rebellion*; a terrible word to use, but he was in a position to form a clear judgment. He called it also *stubbornness*;—another state of mind altogether and most reprehensible in an anointed king. This was, too, the second time the king had transgressed—and let us remember how baneful to the whole people of the kingdom would be an example of self-will and disobedience on the part of the king,—Not only so, but how damaging to the whole line of succeeding kings would be an example of unpunished disregard of the commands of God in the first. It was of the most essential importance that the kingdom should be a kingdom of obedience,—consisting of loyal and faithful servants of Jehovah. But how could this be if the first king was disloyal and unfaithful, yet remained unpunished. Sound reason, therefore, and a consideration of the simple fitness of things must lead to the conclusion of the absolute wisdom and righteousness of the deposition of such a king, and the appointing of another in his place.

CHAPTER XV.

DAVID—THE BEGINNING OF HIS CAREER.

(I. Samuel xvi.)

It is one of the most interesting things in historical study to watch the early developments in the life of men who have become famous in the world. With great statesmen, great kings, great writers in poetry or prose, great warriors by sea or land,—not to speak of great lawyers, inventors, explorers,—men always have a keen interest in their early beginning, and delight—as authors well know—in anecdotes and incidents, illustrating the dawn of the powers which, in their maturity, raised them to the eminence they occupied. In some cases, these early beginnings are wrapped in obscurity; no incident, no anecdote, no event of early life has survived. In other cases there is an abundance, and sometimes a superabundance, of them.

In these studies of Scripture biography *so far*, more than one man has come before us whose name has survived all the changes of the centuries; such as ABRAHAM, JACOB, JOSHUA; but most of all MOSES. But the progress of events has now brought us to the beginning of the life of a man who, not only in his life of action and suffering, his deeds of courage and endurance; in the romantic sequence of events that befell him, was lifted above his fellows; but far beyond this, who by a poetic genius lit up by the fire of Divine inspiration, has left to the devout souls of all ages the most wonderful series of sacred compositions that the world has ever seen.

The Book of Psalms of David is such an extraordinary treasure-house of widely diversified religious experience, that it furnishes a mirror in which every man can see an echo of his own hopes, his own fears, his own moods of exaltation or depression; and learn through the experience of a man who has passed on the same way before him, how to order his own steps in the ever-varying scenes of life. It would seem,

by Divine Providence that every shade of the experience of mankind should be reflected by it, and then that the power should be given him, to express those experiences with extraordinary force and vividness, for the comfort and edification of devout souls in all coming time. That this has been the effect of David's life and writings is unquestionable.*

Saul, though declared to be deposed from the kingdom by the voice of God's prophet, continued, as is plain, to exercise the functions and powers of a king to the day of his death. It is a singular condition of things; and no reason is given why it should have been allowed so long. But allowed it was, in the order of Divine government. And it gave rise to many of the striking events recorded in the early life of David. It must have been indeed necessary, in any event, considering David's youth, that the actual exercise of sovereignty should be with Saul, for some time; some considerable time indeed. And, from what transpired between Samuel and Saul after sentence of deposition had been pronounced, (chap. xv., 28), it is evident that a friendly arrangement to this effect might have been carried out. It is absolutely certain that David would have offered no opposition,—for throughout the whole of his life, up to the time of Saul's death, there is not the least trace of ambition, or desire to assume the sovereignty. He stands out before us as conspicuous for disinterestedness and unselfishness, as for courage in war and confident faith in God.

The manner in which he was indicated as the choice of God was remarkable enough. From the very beginning, it would seem as if the Divine will had been for an hereditary succession,—but only in case of obedience and faithfulness. This succession was forfeited

* It will be seen that the author adheres to the long prevalent idea of the larger part of the Psalms as being the composition of David himself. Some of them are expressly attributed to others in the Book of Psalms itself. But the great majority of them are in the same book attributed to him, and have so been considered by the Church of God from the earliest Christian times. And, it must be confessed that the reasons given to the contrary by some modern critics do not display good judgment, but very much the contrary.

by Saul,—and a new line had to be chosen. But the choice was not to be by the people; holy nation as they were. The Almighty Ruler exercised the supreme function of nominating the new king. The future king was to be the *Anointed* of God; but who he was to be was unknown until a Divine monition was conveyed to the aged prophet. As in the case of Saul, much is said of the *father* of the chosen man. He was evidently a strong man; father of seven stalwart sons, a freeholder and farmer of Bethlehem; Jesse by name, and a grandson of that devoted woman, Ruth, who for love of the God of Israel, had left her country and kindred. One may surmise that this had something to do with the choice. But much more must the choice have been influenced by the character of the man himself. For already the youngest son of the family had given evidence of a high and noble spirit. He had shewn great courage in guarding the flocks of his father from the attacks of wild beasts; he was skilled in music, and probably, even thus early, had displayed poetic power. He was, moreover, like Moses and like Saul, a young man of a *comely presence, ruddy, and of a fair countenance*. (v. 12.) But, above all; as it was said of him, *the Lord was with him!* His devoted piety and zeal for God's service had become as conspicuous as his courage and musical skill. But it is somewhat curious, and very unusual, that nothing is said of his *mother!*

The story of Samuel's following the Divine monition is marked by one of those incidents which shew that a prophet sometimes speaks apart from divine monitions, and that then he may be no wiser than another man.

That this was so we have seen conspicuously in the case of Moses. The Apostle Paul, in his Epistle to the Corinthian Christians, expressly writes of certain advice he is giving, that it is his own opinion, and not the counsel of the Lord. (I. Cor. vii.). And Samuel when sent to Jesse, with a Divine intimation that one of his sons was to be chosen; fixes his eye upon the eldest son and says (doubtless to himself),—surely the Lord's anointed is before him. But the Divine monition corrects him at once, with the memorable words, true for all time, true for these days in which we live;—*The Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the*

outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart! (v. 7.) That the Lord is a *searcher of hearts*; that he trieth the very thoughts; that *His word is quick and powerful, discerning even the thoughts and intents of the heart*, (Heb. iv.), is one of the elementary truths of the revelation of God's character.

Men make innumerable mistakes in judgment;—the Divine Ruler makes none. Outward appearances constantly deceive. Many men are better than they look, many worse.

*A man may smile and smile,
And be a villain!*

Yet the countenance is sometimes an index to the soul. And in the early beginning of a new regime, the personal appearance, height of stature, physical strength are all qualities that engage attention and respect. Thus Moses was *exceeding fair*. Thus also was David. And Saul himself, who began so well, was of a most commanding appearance, a very king of men to look at.

The mistake of Samuel was in thinking *only* of the outward appearance and forgetting the essential matter of heart and character. For was it not in these respects that Saul had become deficient;—and was it not a man after God's own heart, a man that could be depended on to do His will, that was to be chosen as Captain over the people?

Thus Samuel, prophet though he was, when exercising his own judgment, was liable to mistake like other men.

But David was the youngest son. And so little did his father think of *him* as being eligible for special honor that he was not even called to the interview with the prophet, until every one of the other sons had been passed over. But when he came in from the fields, *the Lord said Arise, anoint him, for this is he!* (v. 12.)

It is evident that all this was done in strict privacy. David was *anointed in the midst of his brethren*, but nothing was said of it; nothing done. David went on with his work of feeding his father's sheep, the only change being that from that time he received a special endowment of the Spirit of the Lord. It was evidently not intended that David should

become the actual king at this time, for the whole subsequent history shows that this could not have taken place without enormous disturbance; in fact, without civil war. For Saul never acquiesced in the change. He had, at one time, been a man of silence, modesty, and submission. But now, what had he become? Jealous, fierce, vindictive, towards man; and stubborn and rebellious towards His God. It is certain, then, that if there had been any public proclamation of David as king, Saul would have resisted it, and raised up the whole force of the kingdom, so far as he could control it, to put down this new sovereign. Had this taken place, with watchful enemies round about, there would have been irruptions on all sides, and, humanly speaking, the kingdom might have been destroyed.

This was all foreseen by Him who foresees all things; both what is to be, and what might be. And He, in love and mercy to His people so ordered events, and so influenced the mind of David, that he never once, to all appearance, asserted his position as anointed king during the whole lifetime of Saul; a remarkable power of silence and forbearance, indeed, indicating extraordinary wisdom and consideration in so young a man?

Undoubtedly. And especially when we consider David's natural character of boldness and daring, and of poetical and musical skill. A man of strong and passionate feelings; of powerful emotional temperament,—what but the grace of God in a very eminent degree could enable him to exercise such extraordinary self-restraint as he did during many years of almost unparalleled provocation?

It is when we think of this we can understand the full force of what is said of him, after his anointing,—that the SPIRIT OF THE LORD CAME UPON HIM FROM THAT DAY FORWARD. (v. 13.)

Let us dwell upon this again, for it is a point of supreme importance.

THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD is spoken of almost as often in the Old Testament as in the New. And, without indulging in any metaphysical speculations, as to the relation of the persons of the Godhead to each other, or as to the threefold personality at all, it is sufficient for our purpose to note that

this special manifestation of Divinity called the Spirit of the Lord, is again and again spoken of in the older Scriptures, and always as conveying the idea of power, faculty, or ability, sometimes to speak or prophesy, as in Balaam, sometimes to rule and administer, as to various judges, such as Gideon, Jephthah and Samuel. Later on, the idea of holiness, wisdom, and goodness, comes to be more and more prominent—until in the writings of the great prophets, and of Isaiah especially, the Spirit of God moves before us as a moral and spiritual force with as much distinctness as in the New Testament.

David himself well understood this aspect of the power of the Spirit of God, for in that wonderful fifty-first psalm of profound penitence he prays: *Take not thy Holy Spirit from me*,—evidently looking to the Spirit of the Lord as the source of any moral goodness, piety, and faithfulness that he ever had.

The New Testament plainly reveals this as true of every man. All goodness, virtue and godliness, all love, purity, patience, longsuffering are *fruits of the Spirit*, (Gal. v.), as well as all understanding and comprehension of spiritual things. (I. Cor. ii.) Thus it is that unless a man is born of the Spirit he cannot see or enter God's kingdom. (John iii.) And the same Spirit quickened the intellectual faculties of Christ's apostles and enabled them to preach and teach.

When, then, we are told that after his anointing, the Spirit of the Lord came upon David, it is clear from the subsequent narrative that the endowment was both moral and intellectual,—moral—to subdue a strong temper to gentleness and forbearance, to make him devout and faithful to God's law and ordinances, as well as to give him courage and confidence in time of war,—and also, above all this, to quicken and inspire those faculties for poetry and music which were natural to him, and raise them to those lofty heights of inspiration which have made them a source of inconceivable blessing to all succeeding generations.

But as to Saul !—The picture of his life from henceforth is a grievous one indeed. *The Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul.* (v. 14.) Disobedience, self-will, grieved this

heavenly visitant and He left the man to his own devices. And being thus left; all that was evil in him gathered strength; darkened his path and dogged his steps until his sun went down in the darkness of despair.

An evil spirit from God troubled him ! (v.14.)

What may be the exact meaning of this no man knows. And it is vain to speculate.

But that it was somewhat of the nature of a *punishment* for his disobedience is certain. God's government is sometimes retributive in this life. All experience demonstrates this. May this punishment have visited him in this life in order to save his soul in the next? There are gleams of right feeling and repentance occasionally in Saul's after life which make for hope.

But whether this be so or not, his subsequent history, which is wholly intermixed with the history of David, is one of the most instructive studies on record; and one of the saddest.

The withdrawal of the Spirit of God from Saul left him exposed to fits of profound melancholy;—and what could be more natural, when he knew that his kingdom could not continue? Few reflections are more bitter than that of ruined life and darkened prospects.

"Hope springs eternal in the human breast," sings one of our poets, and so it does in ordinary circumstances. But there are sometimes conjunctions of events in the lives of men which forbid the indulgence of hope. One man may be ruined, and retrieve himself; another may be ruined so effectually that recovery is hopeless. A politician may be defeated, and resign; yet bye and bye return to power. Another may be defeated under such circumstances that he is compelled to retire from public life, and end his days in obscurity. The strange and chequered career of Napoleon presented instances of both. Thus with Saul; it was made known as a final decree of Almighty God that he was rejected from the Kingdom. At what time it was made known to him who was to succeed him, does not appear from the narrative. His jealousy of David in the early parts of their

intercourse arose from the praises bestowed upon his courage and prowess; not because it was whispered about that David would by and bye be King.

Yet it was a trying position for Saul: To be king, and yet to carry about with him a sentence of deposition, was one of the hardest trials that could befall any man. But David did not make it harder by any sort of assumption during Saul's life time. He behaved with such marvellous forbearance and modesty that nothing but the constant presence and power of the Spirit of God could have enabled him to continue it.

But Saul, in one of his fits of melancholy, longed for a man who could soothe him by playing on the harp. That,—as we know, was likely to be a potent charm. From the earliest times the power of music to cheer a desponding soul, has been known and experienced.

David, while young, had become known as a skilful player on the harp; and was named to the King as such.

But the commendation of him as a musician was accompanied by other recommendations, exactly such as to make him valuable to a king. He was said to be a *mighty valiant man* and a *man of war*, and *prudent in matters*, and a *comely person*:—but above all, *the Lord was with him*. (v. 18.)

And Saul took greatly to this comely and gifted young man, made him his *armour-bearer*, attached him to his person,—sent to Jesse, his father, saying, "*Let David, I pray thee, stand before me*, for he hath found favor in my sight.

Thus then it came about that when the evil spirit,—in the shape of hypochondria or melancholy, came upon Saul, that *David took an harp and played with his hand; so Saul was refreshed, and was well; and the evil spirit departed from him*. (v. 23.) all which confirms the idea that the evil spirit was really a form of mental disturbance induced by bitter disappointment and blighted hopes, not unmingled with remorse for his past misconduct: a remorse which, let us hope, was converted, in God's mercy, to that repentance which is unto life, and which needs not to be repented of.

NOTE TO CHAPTER XVI.

OF SAVAGERY TO CHILDREN.

In the Indian Mutiny, that shook the power of England to its foundations, some of the native regiments after the revolt, sometimes set up the children of Europeans as *targets for rifle practice*! The horrible savagery of this needs no comment. But it enables us to understand some of the incidents of these narratives, and also of that 138th Psalm, which has been so strangely misconceived by persons ignorant of the events of ancient life.

CHAPTER XVI.

DAVID—THE FIGHT WITH GOLIATH AND ITS CONSEQUENCES.

(I. Samuel xvii. and xviii.)

The narrative of this famous fight should almost certainly, in order of time, come before the events of the latter half of the last chapter. But let it be remembered that chronological order is not always followed in these early chronicles; and sometimes not indeed even in the story of modern events. For there is another kind of order that is sometimes quite as important to follow, viz., the sequence of events that are connected with one another, although other events of a different character have occurred between.

This was the method of the last chapter. The mention of David's anointing and reception of the Spirit of the Lord naturally led to the mention of the Spirit of the Lord departing from Saul, although some time may have intervened between the two. Then, this last naturally is connected with the looking out for a musician to soothe him, and the choice of David for the purpose; yet there is almost a certainty that the fight with Goliath had taken place in the interval. There are other points in which the particulars of the narrative require a resetting in order to make them fit in with the order of time. But what purpose would be answered by such a resetting? It would only substitute one kind of order for another. For each incident of the narrative is noteworthy in itself; instructive and edifying, and satisfying fully the condition as to all Scripture, that it shall be *profitable for correction and instruction in righteousness...*

Bearing all this in mind we can take the incidents as they come, and passing by mere verbal criticisms let the consideration of them enter the heart, and quicken the soul, to the strengthening of faith and hope in God.

The story of David's encounter with Goliath is known to

every school boy who has read the Bible: And a romantic and exciting story it is, full of such vivid and picturesque detail, that the personages seem to move before our very eyes, for this is one of the incidents that is told most carefully. Thus we can see the Philistine host, encamped again on Israelitish ground, in the hilly country ~~east~~ of Jerusalem belonging to the tribe of Judah.*

For, by one of those rapid changes in the wars of those times, the Philistines had entirely recovered from the disastrous defeat inflicted on them by Jonathan some years before and had invaded the land of Israel again. And they were in great force. There was more than one army of them, and they were bold and confident; and there is the host of Saul on the opposite hill; Saul himself being dispirited and melancholic; for not long before, the news of his rejection had been conveyed to him. And as the leader was dispirited, so, very naturally, were the people under him.

It is a melancholy spectacle. Of an army of Israelites, hardly a man seemed to realize who and what they were, and what their God, the God of the Covenant, had promised to do for them. AL utterly faithless body of men from the King downward; (only too true a type of the condition of the Christian Church in some ages) though surely one may hope that Jonathan was not there. Apparently he was not. And here comes out a CHAMPION on the Philistine side; a champion whose style and bearing seem to bring the story down to the medieval times of Christendom. A man of very great stature, doubtless a descendant of one of those people of Anak whose appearance so frightened the spies and caused them in their miserable faithlessness to feel like grasshops.

* It was very easy for the Philistines to make incursions into the Israelitish territory, for the small streams flowing down from the hill country of Judah and Benjamin passed through Philistia on their way to the sea. Thus the valleys and ravines through which they flowed formed a natural highway by which an army could ascend from the low country of the Philistines to the hilly region inhabited by the Israelites. It was in one or other of these valleys that nearly all the conflicts between the Israelites and the Philistines took place, including this single combat of Goliath and David.

The railway from Jaffa to Jerusalem passes through this very region, and any one who has travelled over it, as the writer has, will have a very clear idea of the circumstances narrated.

pers beside them. A man in complete armour,—(again singularly like the style of the middle ages)—*armed with a coat of mail, a helmet of brass on his head, greaves of brass upon his legs; and a gorget of brass over his throat; (v. 5, 6.)* armed *cap-a-pie*,—so that it would seem impossible to do him any injury. Then for offensive weapons he had a sword and a spear, and one bearing a shield went before him.

All of which shows, by the way, how well developed the arts and handicrafts of the time were;—for no uncivilized people of modern times could work so skilfully in brass and iron as all this indicates.

This champion, thus armed, of gigantic stature and strength, a veritable Samson in fact,—as the weight of his spear testifies, comes out day after day to defy the armies of Israel, and dare them to send a man against him. Why the armies did not attack each other in the ordinary way does not appear from the narrative. But so it was: Both of them remained in position,—in *battle array*, day after day, and each had a good position, a hill-side, with a valley in front, not much unlike the field of Waterloo, but very much more steep in its sides.

It has not been unknown in modern warfare, that two armies remain near each other in full battle array, for weeks together, each watching for a favorable opportunity to attack the other. Thus did the English and French armies in the Peninsular War, when near Salamanca, watch each other, day after day, until the eagle eye of Wellington detected a false move of the French Marshal, made a fierce and sudden attack, and in less than an hour gained one of the most striking victories of modern times. It may have been that Saul and the Philistine leader were similarly watching; though Saul was watching in despondency because of unfaithfulness and forgetfulness of God. And being thus unfaithful he might have been defeated with disaster had he attacked, trusting in the arm of flesh. Probably he would.

But there was another watching too; even *He that sitteth in the heavens*; (Psalm ii.) whose word, both of warning and encouragement, had been spoken long before. And it had been proved by the experience of this people, during many hundred years, in many sore exigencies, that the Word of

the Lord could stand. For it is a truth for all time,—for our time as well as any other; that while *flesh is grass, and the goodness thereof is as the flower of the field*, THE WORD OF OUR GOD SHALL STAND FOR EVER. (Isaiah xl., 6, 7, 8.)

For all this while, there was a young man, a farmer's son, like Saul himself, going about his daily tasks faithfully, tending the flocks of his father, not very far away, but too young to be enrolled in the ranks of the army. He was a devout young Israelite who believed in God: a young man of prayer,—probably disliked and sneered at by the ungodly fellows of Bethlehem, as such men generally are. There is abundant evidence of this in his Psalms, for many of the most touching of them were composed when he was only a few years older than he was then. And they reflect vividly experiences which go back to the time when he was unknown to the world; and spent his days tending his father's sheep.

But though the world did not know him, he was known to Almighty God, and to the few who had seen him anointed by Samuel as the future king.

Thus then, he was there. And in this miserable day of faithlessness and cowardice, when not a man dare stand up relying on the God of Israel, it was precisely such a one as he that was sorely needed. For the Philistine, doubtless by consent of the leaders of the Philistine Army came out proposing that the whole fate of the war should rest on the issue of a single combat.

The issue, as he proposed it, was a tremendous one,—nothing less than that the vanquished side should submit themselves as servants to the other. What this implied the Israelitish people knew only too well by the bitter experience of a time not long past.

But Saul had not accepted this issue. In fact, it was an impossible condition, as events proved. For when their champion was killed, the Philistines did not submit themselves at all, but fled to their own country by one impulse, in the manner that a defeated army flees.

But a new element appeared on the scene in the shape of a man with strong faith in Almighty God. That was the one thing needed. And it came about in so singular a way that

it is evident that a Divine hand was interposing; a Divine hand, yet working, as was the Divine way, usually, by purely human instrumentalities.

For Jesse, having three elder sons in Saul's army, sends the youngest to see how they fare. Some desultory skirmishing was going on, (v. 19 and 20) but the champion was still coming out with defiance and insult to the centre of the valley; striking these faithless Israelites with terror; and this young man, David, arriving in the midst of all this, hearing their frightened talk, as they were saying, "*Have ye seen this man that is come up ?*" and hearing also that the King had promised his daughter in marriage, and also much wealth to the man who could kill the Philistine (though probably this was mere gossip) is stirred to the depths of his soul and cries out:—

Who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the Living God ! (v. 26.) The armies of the Living God ! Indeed, it was high time for some man to talk thus to these Israelites. For, from the King downwards, they had utterly forgotten *the God that had made them*—as Moses long ago had said they would; (Deut. xxxii.) they *had lightly esteemed the Rock of their salvation !* A new power had been brought into the camp by this young shepherd, the power of *Faith*; the power of remembrance of God's promises, the realizing that the army was the army of the LIVING GOD. It was like Napoleon himself arriving when one of his hosts was sore beset. Now the whole atmosphere is changed.*

But the eldest brother (a true touch of nature this) when he heard his brother David talk,—this youngest boy of the

* Let it be remembered that this combat was decided by no miracle, as is sometimes supposed. It came about by purely natural circumstances, and might have been an incident in the heroic days of Greece or Rome. God worked salvation for His wretched people, truly, but only by giving David the wisdom to reject a cumbersome suit of armor, and also at the critical moment a calm cool courage that enabled him to use his own familiar weapon with perfect skill.

Had David not been possessed of this cool courage—the fruit of faith; he never would have dared to assault the champion. And even if he had, his hand could hardly fail to have trembled, and defeat to have ensued.

family, takes him sharply to task. Eh ! What are you doing here ? *With whom hast thou left those few sheep in the wilderness ? I know thy pride and forwardness. Thou hast just come down to see the battle !*

But David answers quickly that he had good reason for coming (as indeed he had) for his father had sent him ; and turns from his fretful brother to talk again to the discouraged soldiers. And now the King hears of him, sends for him, hears his bold project ;— as he says, *Thy servant will go and fight this Philistine ;*” discourages him, with a kind of fatherly pity—*thou art not able, —a mere youth ;* and he a man of war from youth ; only to draw out from David a little history that possibly would never have been known otherwise. “ *Thy servant kept his father’s sheep, and there came a lion, and a bear, and took a lamb out of the flock ; and I went out after him and smote him, and delivered it out of his mouth ; and when he arose against me, I caught him by the beard and smote him, and slew him !* A daring and bold feat,— mark of a strong spirit, as well as of great bodily strength :—a deed to boast of, and doubtless well known.

But David was no braggart. A braggart could not have done it. Yet there is—for a moment,—a touch of boasting as he goes on with his story ; which was told with strong feeling and evident excitement. But it is most life-like ; most natural. We can see this ruddy young fellow,—flushed with anger at the cowardice of his people, and flushed too with the thought of the desperate encounter before him ;—going on to say : “ *Thy servant slew both the lion and the bear* (at two separate times, doubtless for a lion and a bear would hardly come up from the thickets of the Jordan valley together)—*and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them, seeing he hath defied the armies of the Living God !* Brave and bold spirit,—but not a boaster in himself, for he goes on,—as we can see Saul looking at him with a sort of incredulity, yet mixed with admiration, (and was there not some kindling of shame at his own want of faith ?) “ *The Lord that delivered me out of the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear, He will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine.*

Saul cannot resist such an appeal, tremendous as the issue

was—for there could be no manner of doubt that if David were killed, the Philistine host would burst upon the Israelites and sweep them from the field, with terrible slaughter.

With all these issues before him, and they *must* have been before him; he still could not but give this strange young champion leave to go. But, he adds,—remembering the terrible disparity between the two. *The Lord be with thee!*

And the Lord was with him evidently. Yet the rest of the story only brings out more strikingly the Divine method of working by wisely chosen human instrumentalities. The King most naturally concluded that this young champion would wish to meet the Philistine armed with coat of mail, helmet of brass and sword. And the armour was fitted upon him; but when his investiture was complete, and David set out to go to this (from a human point of view) most perilous encounter,—he appears suddenly to have stopped, turned round, and said, "*I cannot go with these,—this helmet, this coat of mail;—I have not proved them;*"—that is—plainly, I have never had such armour on before, I have not been accustomed to it;—I would not know how to fight in it. I cannot go in this fashion.*

But is his heart failing him at the last moment? Evidently no. But why then, does he not keep the armour on, and trust in Divine power to enable him to use it? Why? Because Divine power is guided by Divine wisdom, and that wisdom always works by the most wisely chosen means.

And the wisest mode for David in this unequal combat was not to load himself with armour which he was entirely unused to, but to use a weapon whose powers he had often tested. "*I have not proved this armour,*" says the young man, the spirit of wisdom and prudence from God being upon him;—(Isaiah xi.) but there are weapons that I have proved a hundred times and whose power I know;—my sling and my staff.

* Divine wisdom appears in the direction in the law to send all faint-hearted volunteers home; it was conspicuous in the direction to Gideon to retain only three hundred men, and make a night demonstration with lamps and pitchers; it was equally manifest in guiding Jonathan to make the daring attempt to take the fort of Michmash with only two men. In all these cases increased numbers would only have been an encumbrance.

What he would have done with the staff had the sling failed we know not. But he took it; for the Philistine notices it in his disdainful sneers at David's youth,—and the staff now carried by shepherds at this very day on those same hills is a pretty formidable weapon. (David had evidently brought his sling with him from Bethlehem. He probably carried this about in all his rambles; as he easily could. As to his staff it would help him to climb and descend the hills.) The preliminary words of the two combatants, when they draw near each other, are most characteristic. The Philistine in full armour, disdainfully looking down on David, angry at his presumption, *cursing him by his gods* for coming out against him as if he were a dog to be driven off with a stick, and crying out, "*Come near to me, and I will give thy flesh unto the fowls of the air, and the beasts of the field,*" David replying, with wonderful calmness and dignity, "*Thou comest to me with a sword, and a spear and a shield; but I come to thee in the name of the Lord of Hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied!*"

Here speaks the man of faith, worthy of the line of those *who through faith, subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness*, stopped the mouth of lions and escaped the edge of the sword. (Heb. xi.) And it is not as a braggart and vain boaster, but as a man of confidence in Almighty power that he goes on to say:—

"*This day will the Lord deliver thee into mine hand, and I will smite thee, and take thine head from thee,—. . . that all the Earth may know there is a God in Israel!*" (Here we have the words of the future prophet and psalmist, who so often called upon all the lands of the earth, and all the nations therein, to praise and magnify the God of Israel.) His last words, before this strange encounter are equally memorable, "*And all this assembly shall know that the Lord saveth not with the sword and spear. For the battle is the Lord's, and He will give you—*(not Goliath only but the whole Philistine host) *into our hands!*"

The rest is well known. A proper stone is fitted to the sling,—the aim of that practised eye is true; the whole force of the sinewy frame is put into the arm, the stone flies, like a

musket ball to its mark; and this gigantic man falls stunned and helpless to the ground. Then David, with the Philistine's own sword, slays him and cuts off his head;—all which comes about naturally, without miracle, the only supernatural thing about it being that David's faith in God makes him bold, calm, confident, and able to use every bodily and mental faculty that was in him to the desired end.

And the same faith is the mighty power which lies at the foundation of all success in the new dispensation. For it is faith that justifies before God, unites to Jesus Christ, enables the soul to appropriate the gifts of the Holy Spirit; and so enables the Christian man to take his part in fighting the battles of the Lord with *the rulers of this world's darkness*, and the mighty forces of giant evils which are rampant in Christendom and also amongst the heathen nations of the world.

CHAPTER XVII.

SAUL'S LIFE IN CONNECTION WITH DAVID.

(I. Samuel, xvii to xxiii.)

The events that transpired in the lives both of King Saul and David after the combat with the gigantic Philistine, are such as to bring into striking prominence, on the one hand, the elevating and quickening influence of the Spirit of God upon the soul of a man possessing it, and, on the other, the steady and saddening process of deterioration in the character and works of a man from whom the Spirit of God has withdrawn. For, whatever be the law of the operation and manifestation of the Spirit of God in the life of a Christian man in this dispensation, (too wide an enquiry to be entered upon here) it is plain from this record that Saul, in early life had been subject to the operation of the Spirit of God in a marked degree, insomuch that he was, as Samuel expressed it, *turned into another man*. And, that he exhibited *the fruits of the Spirit* (Gal. iv.) in a striking degree, in meekness, gentleness, forbearance and forgiveness of his enemies is plain. Yet, it is equally plain that after his elevation and confirmation in power a change for the worse set in, manifesting itself in self-will, pride and disobedience, until at length the Spirit of the Lord departed from him altogether;—after which his life is one of a tumultuous conflict of evil passions, the outworking of human nature in him pure and simple, unchecked and uninfluenced by the higher operation of the Spirit and Law of God. It is impossible for any man to possess himself fully of the dark developments of Saul's later life without a sort of trembling and awe; just as we might watch the uncertain course of a ship on a stormy sea that has lost her rudder, which plunges about hither and thither, but always in more and more danger, until she is finally engulfed by the waves, or dashed as a wreck upon the shore.

And the impression which such a contemplation is calculated to produce upon a Christian man, in these days, is surely that of serious fear, as expressed in that warning of the Apostle, "*Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.*" (I. Cor. x.) This very warning is drawn from incidents of Old Testament history;—and it gives a key to the use which the Divine Spirit intended to be made of them by people in these Christian times. They are all *examples*,—as the apostle expresses it; or, as the word might be translated, *types*—pictures moving before the eye; which show us as we look at them, the developments and consequences of wrong-doing; even as a tiny leak from a mountain dam if neglected, will become a mighty flood rising over its banks, and bursting down on the valley below in ruin and desolation. Let us remark in passing how accurate the language of the Apostle is. He does not say, *let him that standeth take heed lest he fall*; but let him that *thinketh* he standeth; the danger being in the thought; the thought of security (against temptation) the thought that I, being such a man as I am, can never become such a man as Saul was. When such a thought as that lodges in the soul,—that is the time and hour of danger.

Now, the course of Saul's life, when this course of declension had begun is one of terrible interest; it is the development of a tragedy like that of Macbeth or Othello—with tragic circumstances in its progress and a terrible ending at last. Let us note it step by step.

Having first advanced David to a high position near his own person, as a consequence, not only of his killing the Philistine but taking the lead in routing the Philistine army, he breaks out into a tumult of angry jealousy when he hears David praised above himself by the women of Israel who come out and sing—in their simple-heartedness, *Saul has slain his thousands; but David his ten thousands!* That, beyond doubt, was a very unpleasant thing for a king to hear. There have been few Oriental kings, even down to these very times, who could have borne this with calmness. And many of them would have taken measures at once to have so dangerous a rival removed. The bowstring or the sword, or the dungeon for life;—one or other of these would

be his fate. But this is human nature. Divine grace, the power of the Spirit of God, could and would have enabled a man to rise superior to such passions. But now, the Spirit of the Lord was absent,—and we are witnessing the development of human passion in the heart of the natural man. Human nature asserts itself as we might expect: "*Saul was very wroth, and he said, (it was gall and wormwood to him to hear it)—'They have ascribed unto David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed but thousands! AND WHAT CAN HE HAVE MORE, BUT THE KINGDOM! The kingdom, indeed! Saul did not realize,—he scarcely ever fully realized; that the kingdom was already devolved upon David by anointing. But it is evident that if David had been a man not under the influence of the Divine Spirit, but filled with natural pride, and ambition, he might have seized so favorable an opportunity of giving effect to his anointing; and taken the kingdom;—putting down Saul. But human nature in David was kept down; and continued to be kept down until God's hour was come.*

The jealous spirit now began to work in Saul! And it grew by what it fed on. *He eyed David from that day forward.* And at the very first opportunity, even when David was playing the soothing strains that were wont to refresh him, and drive the evil spirit away, he casts a javelin, saying to himself, "*I will smite David to the wall with it.*" But his aim is not like the aim of David with Goliath; whilst a calm and confident faith steadied the arm of David, Saul, a prey to tumultuous passion casts his javelin wide of the mark, and his intended victim escapes. But, in his heart Saul is now a murderer.

But the murderer is *afraid* of the man he hates; for he begins to see in him a man surrounded by a Divine protection. *The Lord is with him.* And, judging David by himself, as the manner of men is, he is afraid that David, strong and capable as he is, may take some occasion to retaliate. There would be abundant opportunity for David to kill Saul, if he were still about his person. And there would be a strong temptation to do it; for then David would be king. Saul, therefore, *removed him from him*, and appointing him to a command in the army, making him a cap-

tain of a thousand; not to reward him, or promote him;—but with the deliberate design of sending him to danger that he might be slain. For Saul said—(and here jealousy and murder develope into treacherous plotting) “*Let not my hand be upon him, but let the hand of the Philistines be upon him.*” (Chap. xviii., v. 17.) (But David did the same thing with Uriah, when he also fell under temptation of the devil.)

This treacherous spirit had another manifestation. He had promised his elder daughter to David as a wife;—but, some other man appearing on the scene, to whom it appeared more politic to give his daughter in marriage,—he took her from David without scruple. And, when it appeared that another daughter of his, Michal by name, loved David, Saul seized the occasion of laying a trap for David, in requiring him, as a condition of marrying his daughter, to bring him the proof that he had slain a hundred Philistines.

The hypocrisy and treachery of Saul, in these transactions, are among the darkest records of lying and treachery in history. Medieval times, and even the very times we live in have furnished shameful instances in kings and statesmen of the same thing;—how innocent men have been inveigled into surrender or compliance by specious promises, and then, —ruthlessly murdered. But none of these surpass in cold-blooded, calculating treachery, these transactions, instinct with the murderous spirit, of Saul with David. Need we wonder, that when, by God’s hand upon him, David escaped the snares that were set for him, and out of these very traps and snares was advanced to higher favor with the people, Saul was yet the more afraid of David. Of whom is a man so much afraid as of the man to whom he bears a deadly ill-will, but who seems to bear a charmed life, and is surrounded with a mysterious girdle of safety. The more Saul hated David, the more he feared him, and, naturally the more determined he was to compass his destruction.

With this in view he gives orders to Jonathan, and also to his servants, to kill David! How the Oriental despot, with power of life and death, is conspicuous here. But Jonathan, as might be expected, not only refuses, but gives David timely warning; and further he pleads strongly with his father,

reminding him that David had done him no wrong, *that his works towards him had been very good.* (Chap. xix., 4.) The pleading of Jonathan is touching; it is the pleading of a true man, a true friend, and a faithful son, and raises up still higher our appreciation of Jonathan's character and the mystery of his untimely cutting off. He reminds his father that *David put his life in his hand, and slew the Philistine, by which the Lord wrought a great salvation for all Israel. Thou sawest it, and didst rejoice! Wherefore then wilt thou sin against innocent blood, to slay David without a cause?* (v. 5.)

For the time, but only for a short time, the King was moved to better thoughts. It is often the case, with men whose general course of life is one of hardened wickedness, that there are occasional gleams of light in the gloom, and times of reflection when better purposes prevail. All experience of mankind and womanhood proves this. And thus it was with Saul in these latter days of degeneracy. More than once he seems to recover himself; he thinks wisely and determines rightly. And thus it was that when Jonathan pleaded, Saul hearkened to his voice, *and swore, as the Lord liveth, David shall not be slain!* And, doubtless, at the moment, he sincerely meant what his oath expressed.

But a time came when his good resolution failed, and the evil spirit gained the mastery again. And it is again the spirit of jealousy that overcomes him, because of David's success in driving back another Philistine host; and the old violent enmity again breaks out. Circumstances repeat themselves. Once more he makes an assault with a javelin while David is playing; (chap. xix., 10.) once more David escapes. But now it is not merely a temporary outbreak—there arises a settled determination to make an end of David; for which purpose he places armed men about the house in the night,—purposing to slay him in the morning, which purpose is only frustrated by his devoted wife letting him down through a window, watching her opportunity; and he, full of energy, and activity, availing himself of it to escape to Samuel at Ramah.

But the vengeful King now send

and finally goes himself. But a watchful Providence is about David. The messengers are stopped,—one company after another, from executing the King's purpose, just as the men sent to apprehend our Saviour by the Pharisees were awed and charmed by his words, and came back without him. And when Saul himself appeared suddenly, enquiring: "*Where are Samuel and David?*" he was seized with a strange impulse—the Spirit of God moving him to prophecy; as it had moved his messengers,—and, turning him from his purpose. He strips off his garments and forgets David altogether. Thus it is shown that *the King's heart is in the hand of the Lord, (Prov. xxi.) as the rivers of water he turneth it whithersoever he will!*

This incident seems to approach very near to an actual development of insanity in Saul; but it is the only one of the kind recorded.

Yet, after all this, Saul seems to expect that David will return to his place in the King's house, as formerly; a strange expectation, and unreasonable. But when were jealousy and angry passion reasonable? But that he did expect it, is evident from the fact that when Jonathan began to make excuses for his friend's absence, Saul's jealous passion turned upon his son, toward whom he burst out into violent and scandalous reproaches, calling him a son of perverseness and rebelliousness, (for this seems the true sense of verse 30, in chapter xx.) upbraiding him for taking the part of the Son of Jesse against his own interests. "*For,*" said he, "*as long as he lives upon the ground, thou shalt not be established, nor thy kingdom.*" But now, to such a height did Saul's passion rise, that on Jonathan's remonstrating, "*Wherefore should he be slain?*" he cast a javelin even at Jonathan himself. The javelin missed. But Jonathan arose in fierce anger, refused to eat with his father that day; and had he not been as good a man as he was, there must have been a permanent breach between them.

The next development is of a different character, and more melancholy still. A moody despair settles down upon Saul; as he finds himself unable to do David harm, he begins to cry out in lance and bitterness of soul, to the people of

his own tribe, "*Hear, now, ye Benjamites, will the Son of Jesse give you fields and vineyards? Will he make you all captains of thousands and of hundreds?*" And, then, he goes on in a pitiful strain, indicating a breaking down of mental power under the strain of his conflicting passions. "*Have all of you conspired against me, that there is none to tell me that my son hath made a league with the Son of Jesse,—none of you that is sorry for me, or showeth unto me that my son hath stirred up my servants against me, to lie in wait, as at this day!*" (Chap. xxii., 7, 8.) With all natural indignation against a man of such perverse and malignant passion we can hardly took on such a melancholy picture as this without a feeling of compassion for the man. What! has the all-powerful and mighty-spirited King of Israel come to this—to babble and complain like a disappointed girl, that nobody is sorry for him! Alas, how is the mighty fallen!

But the malignant spirit soon returns, and with more blood-thirsty violence than ever;—so true is this rude narrative to human nature as we know it. For an Edomite, a chief herdsman in Saul's service, telling that he saw David sheltered by the priest at his city, and supplied with food, and given the sword of Goliath, the King sends for him and all the priests in attendance at the tabernacle, and after violent reproaches and accusations, (reminding us much of certain passages in the life of our Richard III.), and scorning to listen to the priest's explanation,—which was most reasonable,—he determines that the whole company of priests,—every man of them, shall be put to death, "*Because,*" said he, "*their hand also is with David!*" And when his own servants recoiled with horror from the massacre that was ordered, Doeg, this Edomite herdsman, fell upon the priests and slew them all. Then the King, like a tiger whose thirst for blood has been roused, and can not be appeased but by more, with unparalleled barbarity orders that all the inhabitants of this city of the priests, men, women and children alike shall be put to the sword,—a deed which could hardly have been deemed possible but that a similar occurrence took place in early English history, when the monks and students of Bangor were massacred by the Saxon King, Ethelfried, about the year 600.

This massacre is the darkest blot upon the reign of Saul, and upon his character, and is a terrible illustration of the effects of the passion of jealousy and hatred when unrestrained by the fear of God; and let it be said, it is a terrible illustration of how far a man may fall, when he begins to fall, and when the Spirit of God is withdrawn from him. Surely these things have been recorded for *our* admonition upon whom the ends (or final issues) of the world are come. (I. Cor. x.)*

Yet, almost immediately after this outbreak of barbarous cruelty and bloodthirstiness, when the passions of a human tiger were raging, unchecked through the soul—we find him again in the mood of plaintive querulousness. David by this time has been forced to lead a wandering life, being *hunted like a partridge in the mountains*, and when some who have seen him propose to betray his hiding place to the King, Saul replies, "Blessed be ye of the Lord: *for ye have compassion upon me.*" Ye have compassion upon me. Is it possible that the King can say this?

What a falling off is there! Saul conceives himself, as being *compassionated* by his own subjects; he, who has known how to make them tremble at his presence and fly from him in mortal fear, is now in such dejection as to thank them for taking pity upon him.

Is this incredible? Can the same man be a violent and bloodthirsty tyrant one day, and within a short time be reduced to a condition of such abject humiliation as this? One whose acquaintance with the ways of men and the develop-

* It is said that Saul had been taught by Samuel himself that it was right to put men, women and children to the sword (as in the case of the Amalikites), and that such teaching had hardened his heart and made him indifferent to bloodshed. If it is so said, it is said with an entire absence of reason. For what possible analogy is there between a military expedition against armed marauding tribes like the Amalekites, whose very business was murder and bloodshed, and the massacre in cold blood of a company of unarmed priests? And what analogy between putting to death the wives and children of such marauders, which, as has been shown, was the most merciful course to be pursued under the circumstances, and the putting to death of women and children who were all Israelites, and whose presence in the land, under no conceivable circumstances, could do any harm.

ment of character, in diverse circumstances is limited, might conceive it to be impossible. But we may "inquire curiously" or shake our head incredulously, as we please, but all experience proves that the human mind is a deep pit;—and that the character of many men is a bundle of contradictions. Men of passionate nature always tend to move like a pendulum, oscillating this way and that way; and the more passion to impel and the less reason to control, the more violent the oscillation. It is, therefore, antecedently probable that a man like Saul, having lost the controlling principle of his life, would be driven to extremes of conduct exactly such as are described in this remarkable narrative. The lesson of the whole, as was noticed before, being: *Let him that THINKETH he standeth take heed lest he fall.*

CHAPTER XVIII.

SAUL'S LATER YEARS, HIS VISIT TO THE WITCH OF ENDOR, AND HIS DEFEAT AND DEATH.

(I. Samuel xxiv to xxxi.)

At no time is there displayed on the part of Saul such a softening of heart towards David as occurred twice during the later years of his life. David, as has been seen, is now permanently separated from Saul. He is practically outlawed. A band of roving adventurous men have gathered about him who might have been, under other leadership, a terror to the peaceable people of the land; and even to Saul himself. But under one like David, they were kept in strict discipline. They did no wrong to the people around them, and they never attacked the King's forces.

Saul, however, still pursuing his purpose of destruction, venturing into the wild fastnesses of Eastern Judah, in the hope of capturing his son-in-law, and being completely in David's power more than once, his life is spared; and he is suffered to depart in safety. But, David, having cut off a part of his robe, calling to him, showing the robe, as a proof that he has spared his life, and making a pathetic appeal to his better self, the heart of Saul is melted, and he cries out, "*Is this thy voice, my son David?*" bursting out into weeping and acknowledging his wrong; and, for the first time, giving evidence of knowledge that David must succeed to the kingdom, he is only anxious to make terms with him regarding his family after his death.

A very striking instance is this of the power of generosity and forbearance to break down enmity;—even the bitterest and most inveterate,—at any rate, for a time;—an illustration of what is stated to be the effect of doing good to an enemy by the Apostle Paul in writing to the Christians of Rome: "*If thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give*

*him drink, for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head."**

The heaping of coals of fire on the head is plainly an image of melting and refining; and not of burning and destruction. And the softening of the heart of such a one as Saul had become is a perfect instance of it.

The incident related in chap. xxvi. is exactly of the same kind. Both will be treated of more fully in considering the life of David; meantime let it be noticed that after a lapse of time David once more has Saul's life in his hand, and once more sparing his, though urged to destroy him by his military companions. Saul awaking to the knowledge of it, again breaks down in sorrowful acknowledgment of wrongdoing; going even further than before and saying, "*I have sinned!—behold I have played the fool and have erred exceedingly!*" (Chap. xxvi., 21.)

These sound like the words of genuine repentance; and one may well wish that a *repentance unto life* might have been developed in the soul of this most unhappy man. At any rate, we hear no more of any persecution of David. And only one incident of his further life remains on record until the terrible day of his defeat and death.

The Philistines had invaded the land again;—proceeding inland, doubtless from near Mount Carmel, (very easy of access from their country) up the plain of Jezreel, and spreading out their host near the little town of Shunem, afterwards noted as the dwelling place of the good woman whose son Elisha restored to life. They were now far inland;—encamped in the very heart of the country; and Saul who had gathered the Israelites together on the fatal eminence of Gilboa, when he saw the Philistine host spread out before him at Shunem, *was afraid and his heart greatly trembled*. (Chap. xxviii., 5.) The fierce resolution and warlike spirit of former days had departed from the old man during the

* The sentence, however, is a quotation from the Book of Proverbs (Chap. xxv., 21), but it had peculiar force when addressed to a people who were accustomed to the murderous vengeance taken on enemies by emperors and other men in power, such as the Roman history of that time is only too full of.

terrible stress of the last few years. He was disheartened at the troubles of his kingdom. And Samuel, the prophet, who could have counselled and helped him, was no more. (v. 3.)

Then when Saul sought counsel of the Lord,—the Lord answered him not ! Let us note the manner of this. The Lord answered him not; *neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets.* In one or other of these ways, was the Divine mind revealed in those days. As to the first of these, namely by dreams, by the word coming in the night,—when deep sleep falleth upon man, (Job iv., 13), there had been no instance since the day when the child Samuel heard the mysterious call in the days of Eli. Of prophet speaking with Divine authority there had been none during Saul's life-time save Samuel.

The Divine counsel through the mysterious breast-plate of *Urim and Thummim* came always through the chief priest.

But Saul had massacred nearly all the priests. How then could God answer him by *Urim* ? Then, in the extremity of his misery, this wretched King conceived the thought of seeking counsel through a woman with a familiar Spirit. This led to that mysterious interview with the Witch of Endor, which is probably better remembered than any other passage in the life of Saul. What was his object in seeking out this woman ? It is plain by what followed that he had no intention of asking counsel or advice from her.

This was not the mode in which such people rendered service to those who believed in them. What they professed to do was to open communications with the spirits of men who had passed away. Their profession was exactly that of the Spiritualists of our own day; who, as is well known, claim the power to call up the dead to converse with the living;—and give out what they claim to be messages from the wise and good who have passed into the unseen world.

The art of Necromancy—or intercourse with the dead—was completely developed in those early ages of the world, for this is what the word "necromancy" means, but all forms of it have passed away amongst civilized people, except this one of Spiritualism. And the fact that this has attained such a prominence amongst some educated people

in this age—shows how strong is the instinct of desire to have conversation with the departed. And the instinct was just as strong amongst the Jewish people, as it is with people of a certain temperament in our own day.

But all forms of magic, and necromancy had been strictly forbidden by Almighty God, speaking through Moses to His people. (Deut. xviii., 10.) This, for three reasons: In the first place, they were all forms of falsehood;—in the second place, they were all essentially bound up with idolatry; and, in the third, they were parts of systems of immorality so gross and defiling as to be called *abominations*. And it is obvious that the whole system tended, as spiritualism tends now, to draw away the mind from confidence in a Living, All-ruling God and All-Wise Guide.*

But the desire for such things was deeply rooted in human nature, and though necromancy was against the law; though it was treason against the Divine government, there continued to be those who practised it, and people who resorted to them.

But Saul, at some period of his reign, had carried out the law, and put down all such practices. The penalty, let us remember, was death. Yet such magical arts still lingered; but it was in *secret places*, and the workers of them were only to be found in remote rocky defiles where caves abounded of which the entrance was concealed—just such places as were formerly the resort of smugglers on the rocky coasts of Great Britain. The ravines of Palestine abound with them, as any traveller can see who passes through the land.

Such was the place where this woman practised her unlawful arts; Endor,—not far from Saul's own camp, and, where, in disguise, he visited her. And now, when he spoke to the

*The connection between sorcery and demoralization in savage people of these times has been noticed by so acute an observer as the late Henry Drummond. Speaking of evangelizing an island of savages, he says that sometimes a missionary is welcomed, as they know that *Christianity will abolish sorcery, which is the cause of death and war*.—Drummond's Life, p. 424.

It is significant as a fact bearing somewhat on the foregoing that the attack on certain missionaries in the year 1895, which resulted in the massacre of devoted men and women of the Church Missionary Society, was led by a well-known sorcerer.

woman, it became clear what it was he wanted. Not her counsel, but the counsel of SAMUEL,—Samuel,—the faithful and plain-speaking prophet—the man who was never afraid to tell him the truth,—but who was now dead; alas, for Saul! who now conceived the desperate expedient of endeavouring to gain some sort of communication with him through this woman's sorcery.

What happened is sometimes looked upon as one of the mysteries of the sacred record. But, properly considered, it is no mystery at all. The King, in disguise, goes to the woman by night; it was obviously unsafe for her to appear in the day. And in answer to her query: "*Whom shall I bring up?*" he answers: "*SAMUEL,*" Then—as the narrative goes on—the woman professed to see Samuel, and cried out in a sort of terror, "*Why hast thou deceived me, for thou art Saul,*" evidently concluding that the King had laid a trap for her.

But, undeceiving her, he enquires "*What sawest thou?*" for, up to this moment, he had seen nothing. She answers, in the mysterious style of her craft, "*I saw gods ascending out of the earth!*" (v. 13.) There is nothing to indicate Samuel in this;—for *gods ascending*,—could certainly not mean the aged prophet; and all that has transpired clearly points to the woman practising some kind of magical incantation and pretending to see strange and mysterious things,—*gods*;—and *ascending out of the earth*, rising from their graves, as it were, not coming down, as gods might be expected to do—from above. The King, let us note, was in a condition of profound depression of spirit, weak, through long fasting,—the fasting not being a religious fasting, but a simple inability to eat from depression of spirit and despair. He had left his army, had made a night's journey to seek an unlawful interview with this necromancer;—he was conscious of wrong-doing, and that terrible melancholy almost amounting to madness was upon him;—he was, in reality, at that moment, in such a state of tension as to be hardly sane.

In this condition he hears the woman say she saw *gods*—or, as the word might imply, eminent ones—judges;—and, forgetting that she spoke in the plural, and mysteriously, in the manner of her craft, he asks: "*What form is he of?—he,*—his whole frame on the rack in eager desire to have some

word—no matter what—from the departed prophet. The woman answers, (the whole transaction showing it was an imposture so far as she was concerned)—“*an old man cometh up*”—not *gods* this time, but—“*an old man, and he is covered with a mantle.*” Doubtless she had often seen Samuel in his life-time when he went on circuit as a judge and knew how to describe him.

Then it was that Saul, in his peculiar condition of almost insane eagerness, catches on the woman's words, and when he hears of an old man with a mantle, supposes that Samuel is really appearing. The narrative, in our translation, might lead to a supposition that there was a real return of Samuel from the invisible world, and a real communication, from God through him, as aforetime. But a careful consideration of the circumstances is all against such a conclusion. For, to begin with, we learn that Divine communication with the unfortunate man had ceased. “When Saul enquired of the Lord, (v. 6) *the Lord answered him not*, neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets ! But, further,—what happened in this midnight interview with a sorceress was exactly what might have been expected to happen,—without anything supernatural intervening. It is exactly like what has repeatedly happened, in recent years, when spiritual mediums have been consulted. In these cases, the first point with the medium is to find out who the consulting party *wants to see*. Having ascertained this, the rest is comparatively easy ; for practise, experience, and some natural skill, enables a medium to tell an enquirer what, in the excitement produced by darkness and awfulness, will readily be received as a communication from the spirit world. Let it be remembered, that persons practising these arts, in these days, always have machinery about them, enabling them to produce almost any effect that may be desired. This is their art. These things are their stock in trade. Even as with theatrical performances, there are appliances for producing effects like those of the ghost of Hamlet's father, or the spirits that rose at Macbeth's feast. And, as it is now, so it was in former ages. Magicians were fully as skilful then as they are now, as the narrative of Moses before Pharaoh plainly shows. And this woman must have been as skilful as the

rest, or she could not have maintained her reputation at all. She was quick witted, as is plain from the interview, and she would certainly have about her, as her stock in trade, one or more persons—one, indeed, would be sufficient; who, with the aid of dresses, and other disguises could personate any dead personage whom she pretended to call up. And she could also, just as spiritualists do now, concoct words that would be received as real messages from the spirit world. If she could not do this, her occupation would be gone. But she was evidently one whose skill was well known. Thus, then, if a real person appeared at all, it was, doubtless, a confederate who had put on a sufficient disguise to look like a prophet in the surrounding gloom.

And the conversation was exactly such as would ensue, in our own day, with a spiritualistic medium. The spirit of the departed inquires: "Why he has been called?" This is part of the craft;—to obtain a clue to what is wanted, and to guide the medium in giving an answer. Even so this wretched King is asked, "Why?" and he answers, "*I am sore distressed; the Philistines make war against me, and God is departed from me; and answereth me no more!*" (v. 15.) "*Therefore, I have called thee;*"—all which was only too miserably true.

But now, it may be asked, how it could be, on such a supposition as this, that such an answer could be given to Saul as was given; so true, so serious, so pertinent to the time; and, especially, how could an impostor make so true a prediction as that he should be defeated and die on the following day.

Respecting this, the following may be said:—

As to the first part of the message it is only a repetition of what the real Samuel had said long before, and which must certainly have become known to many of the Israelitish people, and, especially, to one who had to sustain the reputation that this woman had. For such persons invariably keep their eyes and ears open. They have, almost invariably, people who secretly believe in them, and bring them intelligence,—which intelligence they ponder over and compare with other things they know, or have had experience of, and so are able to make such shrewd guesses as give them the reputation

they enjoy. It was thus with the ancient oracles of Greece, with the augurs of Rome; and with the soothsayers of Chaldea and Babylon, and it is thus with the spiritual mediums of these times.

And as to the prediction of defeat and death, which was actually fulfilled,—the prediction was one of the kind which are almost certain to bring about their own fulfilment. For the King, already disheartened and melancholy, could not but be driven to utter despair by a message such as that delivered to him. "Thy army shall be defeated, AND TO-MORROW SHALL THOU AND THY SONS BE WITH ME !

How could the general of an army conduct a force to victory who believed such a terrible message as this to have come from a prophet of God? He could not have wisdom to organize his forces well; neither could he inspire them with confidence. An army with such a general could not but be defeated. And his own sons, and the brave and good Jonathan especially, would see that it was not seemly that they should survive such a disastrous day; and, therefore, rush to the very front of battle and meet certain death.

But there is no reason to suppose that the woman had any Divine communication because her words, as it happened, were fulfilled. Some of the words of these oracles and augurs and soothsayers were always fulfilled, for some were very shrewd forecasts, and others were guesses which might be fulfilled sometimes, or might not. But if they were not, no notice was taken of the failure.*

This supposition of what happened is very much more probable than that there was a real appearance of Samuel, and a real Divine message through him to Saul. For nothing can be more unlikely than that a Divine communication, which had been sought for and refused by lawful methods, should be made to Saul, when sought for in a manner utterly unlawful. That Almighty God should refuse to speak by a prophet or a dream, and speak through the medium of this witch,—who can possibly believe that?

*The words attributed to Samuel, "to-morrow thou shalt be *with me*," plainly indicate a general belief of the people of the time in a future life for those departed from this world.

But, then, it may be rejoined, the narrative plainly says it was Samuel that spoke. But in this, it is no less plain that the narrative only follows the customary style of a narration in referring to the person speaking, or supposed to be speaking,—as the hearer imagines them to be.

The subsequent narrative is one of the saddest in Jewish history.

Saul is defeated (chap xxxi.) as might have been expected. Three of his sons (including the brave and good Jonathan) are slain. Saul himself commits suicide. The Israelites fly in all directions, the people forsake the cities and the Philistines, for a time, occupy the land. And, with a touch of savagery, after cutting off Saul's head, they fasten his body and the bodies of his sons to the wall of the frontier town of Bethshan.

But the valiant men of Jabesh Gilead, about twenty miles away, remembering how Saul had delivered them of old: marched to Bethshan by night, took down the bodies of the King and sons, burnt them in Jabesh (to prevent possibility of further mutilation) and buried the bones under a tree, fasting seven days.

A tragic ending, indeed, to what promised, at one time, to be a noble career.

CRITICAL NOTE.

That such a life as Saul's should end in his committing suicide can hardly be wondered at, considering all that had transpired during his later years. Suicide is the last refuge of a man who has utterly lost heart and hope, and both were now irretrievably gone from the unfortunate king,—gone, that is to say, in his own apprehension, but not necessarily in the reality of things. For, even though his army was defeated, and his sons slain, if he had been a man of faith, he might have recovered himself. The children of Israel were in quite as bad a plight when he was shut up in his stronghold of Gibeah, while the Philistines had full possession of the land, and the people had fled to hiding places amongst the caves and the rocks. But from this they had been recovered by the daring enterprise of Jonathan, who rested his whole chance of success on faith in God (Chap. xiv., 6). And the same help was available still had it been rightly sought for.

But when a man like Saul, a divinely chosen and anointed man, and who had seen what mighty works could be wrought by faith, descended to such a depth as to steal in disguise to a witch and seek direction through her, what could be expected but a disaster, that, so far as Saul was concerned, would be irretrievable. And thus it came about.

But what are we to make of the refusal of Almighty God to answers the prayers for direction of this wretched man (Chap. xxviii 6)? Is it not the doctrine of the Old Testament as well as the New that prayer is heard; and specially prayer for help in time of trouble? Was not this a well established truth long before the time of Saul; and had it not been proved to be true again and again by the experience of the Israelitish people?

When our Psalmist wrote the words, by Divine suggestion, "*Call upon Me in the day of trouble:—I will deliver thee*" (Psalm L.), was he not simply giving expression to a truth that had been known and proved for ages.

How, then, was it that when Saul's day of trouble came, the Lord refused to answer him? And this brings up a very practical question for ourselves. Does there ever arise, in the experience of a man in these Christian times, such a condition of things as that his cry for help and direction will be disregarded. A most serious question indeed, and opening up an enquiry only to be pursued with something like awe. Let us see what light the Divine word itself casts upon the question.

To begin with, we have the *fact*, plainly stated, that at a certain period in the life of Saul, when he enquired of the Lord, the Lord answered him not.

But is it not significant that this silence on the part of the Lord comes after, and apparently not long after, the atrocious massacre of the Lord's priests? And that there is not the least sign of any penitence on the part of Saul, any confession of wrongdoing, any entreaty for pardon? Let that fact be noted, and then let us consider whether any man can come with deep and unacknowledged

wrong upon his head, and make prayer to the Most High that is likely to be answered, merely because he is in temporal trouble. When the Psalmist, speaking in God's name, says, "Call upon me in the day of trouble, and I will deliver thee," he prefaces it by a most significant exhortation, viz.:—*Offer unto God thanksgiving and pay thy vows unto the Most High*. That Saul was not in that condition of mind is certain. It is evident, in the order of Divine procedure, that men may cry unto the Lord, in a day of deep distress, and obtain no help or answer; that is, when they have deep and unacknowledged sin upon their heads. Psalm LXVI. 18 clearly states this: If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me; a sentence that the human conscience inevitably responds to. But there is further light upon this subject in other parts of the Divine word.

In the first chapter of the Book of Proverbs there is a very pregnant passage, indicating the Divine will respecting men who have often been warned, and have persistently refused attention to the warning:—"Wisdom" is represented as crying out publicly; and amongst the rest, to the simple, the scornful, and the fools, in this fashion:—"Because I have called and ye have refused, I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded. But ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof; I also will laugh at your calamity . . . when distress and anguish cometh upon you. Then shall they call upon me, BUT I WILL NOT ANSWER; they shall seek me early, BUT THEY SHALL NOT FIND ME."

Wisdom is here clearly a personification for the Divine Being, and thus we have a declaration from Him whose ordinary word is, *Seek and ye shall find; ask and it shall be given; call and I will answer*; that there may come a time, after long persistence in wrong-doing, and continued obstinate refusal to listen to warning, when a man's cries and prayers will not be heard.

But let us most carefully mark, it is clear that such unheeded cries and prayers must simply be the cries of a man in outward distress, and not the cries of a humbled and penitent soul. And experience shows that men, in a time of danger, sickness or sudden calamity, will cry out for mercy from God without a thought of penitence, or even the beginning of a rational faith. Men may and do cry—Lord have mercy upon me, in shipwreck, fire or accident, who have no thought of penitence whatever.

Can men expect such cries to be answered? This Divine word declares it to be the rule of Divine procedure that they will not.

Thus, then, the practical lesson of all this has two aspects. When a penitent but desponding soul, oppressed by the weight of sins and failures that are felt all the more as conscience is sensitive, and character developed, when such a one prays, and, for a time, without obtaining relief, the thought may perhaps be intruded,—as a temptation of the Devil,—that God will answer no more, even as He refused to answer Saul; and as He threatens to refuse to answer other men, in certain circumstances. Such cases do undoubtedly arise, and pastors are aware of them. But the answer surely is that the very penitence and despondency of heart are precisely the conditions under which God *never* refuses. "A broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise" (Psalm LI.), and, the High and Lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, He looks upon

the men of an humble spirit,—to revive the spirit of the humble and to revive the heart of the contrite ones (Isaiah lvii.).

On the other hand, when a man is going on in his sins, either defiantly or callously, and is careless of ordinary warning and reproof, as many undoubtedly are, they may then be well reminded that a day of distress and anguish like that of Saul may come upon them, when they will call but obtain no answer, when they will seek early for the Lord, and not find Him. For such calling and seeking will arise from the mere pressure of outward calamity, and not from penitential sorrow. It is evident from a passage in the Epistle to the Hebrews (Chap VI.) that in certain cases, the heart of a man may become so callous that it is *impossible* to bring about that condition of penitence and humility, which alone leads to the obtaining of blessing.

But if any souls are in distress from thinking of this passage, the very fact that they *are* in distress, that they are sorrowful, that they are mourning and grieving for a spiritual reason, proves that it is not applicable to *them*.

THE
LIFE AND CAREER

OF

DAVID.

CHAPTER XIX.

SCENES IN THE LIFE OF DAVID BEFORE HE BECAME KING. THE GATHERING TO HIM OF A BAND OF MEN.

(I. Samuel xviii. to end.)

David is set before us as *a man after God's own heart*, mainly in one important respect, viz., that he would do the will of God in respecting God's ordinances of worship, honoring God's tabernacle and priests, obeying God's requirements as to sacrifices and offerings, (1 Samuel xiii., 14) all which became conspicuous elements in his character and life; and increasingly so as he increased in power and wealth. For he it was who brought back the Ark with rejoicing, ordered the musical services of the tabernacle, and composed many most notable psalms, under Divine guidance, to be sung in those services. And the magnificent Temple itself, though actually built by Solomon, was David's conception and design, and all the costly materials for its erection were gathered together by him. In this respect, then, always, and to the end of his days, he fulfilled the word spoken of him. And he fulfilled it in other respects also. The record of his life shows him to have been a man of most modest, generous and forbearing nature, a man ready to forgive injuries, and quick to reward kindness; a man of warm and tender heart towards the unfortunate, yet withal a strong, able, and faithful ruler over the Israelitish people.

Yet he was eminently *a man of like passions with ourselves*, (Acts xiv.) a man at times strongly tempted; and whom the impartial Scripture narrative never scruples to describe as sometimes falling, and falling deeply; into a really *horrible pit and miry clay* of wrong-doing—as he himself describes it;—yet a man who recovers himself, and is as much elevated by his passionate outbursts of penitence as he has been dragged down by indulgence in sin. Such is the man set before us in these chronicles, which have a vivid *vrai-*

similitude about them that carries home a conviction of their reality and truth. But let us bear in mind that neither David nor Solomon nor Samuel are set before us as examples for imitation. David was not the leader of a sect or party in the Jewish Church, having a band of disciples, called after his name, as his great descendant and master, the Lord Jesus, had. It is, therefore, utterly unreasonable for scornors to reproach Christians now because of his sins and misdeeds. These things are told,—as others of the same kind are told,—for our warning. They are beacon-lights to warn men off the dangerous places in the voyage of life. And a wise man will make this use of them, without cavilling.

Taking up the story of David at the point where we left it, after his famous conflict with the Philistine, let us notice his behaviour at the time before the King and people.

His modesty is conspicuous; and so is his good sense. Many a young man would have been puffed up and carried away with vanity when the women praised him so highly above the King. *But David behaved himself wisely in all his ways, and the Lord was with him.* (Chap. xviii., 14.) What that may mean will be seen by the history.

When Saul was carried away by jealousy, and threatened David's life, he forbore any threatening in return; though he could undoubtedly have raised a party against the King, and probably have driven him from the throne. This would be what is called "the way of the world." Such a course has been followed again and again by men in David's position,—both in ancient and modern times, in Rome, and Greece, in England, and in France, down even to our own day. It is in human nature to do this; when men are treated as David had been by Saul. And it might have been expected in *his* case; for he was a man naturally of strong passions, deeply sensitive to insult, and naturally inclined to take strong measures to resent it. The story of Nabal (chap. xxv.) sufficiently illustrates this.

But, it is evident that the power of Divine grace was upon him in a very marked degree. The Divine virtue of forgiveness of enemies so conspicuously displayed and enjoined by

our blessed Lord,—was strikingly displayed in this, his ancestor, by the power of the Spirit of God.

When Saul for the second time sought to take his life, (chap. xix., 10.), he did not resist, as he certainly could have done, but fled. Yet, at the touching solicitation of his friend, Jonathan, he was willing to return to his place in the King's house, (chap. xx., 1 to 10.), being willing to forgive the outrages he had been subjected to; though, as he expressed it: "*There would be but a step between him and death.*" He was thus willing to risk his life, out of love to his friend. But Jonathan sees that he cannot press the matter so far. For his father has become so implacable that at a sign of friendship for David on the part of Jonathan, the torrent of his wrath breaks forth against his son. After a wicked tirade of abuse, the King attempts to kill even Jonathan himself. (Chap. xx., 33.) This brings matters to a final issue. Jonathan sorrowfully concludes that David, can never safely enter his father's house again, and the two dear friends part; with words of such touching tenderness on Jonathan's part that we cannot but wonder—and with a touch of grief and awe—that events were suffered to continue as they were. Saul being uppermost; though living in malice and perverse enmity,—Jonathan; a man in every respect far nobler, a good man, a valiant soldier, a faithful friend, subsiding into a silence never again to be broken but upon one brief occasion. Thus deep are the ways of Providence in this world; only suggesting, as so many have noticed, the necessity of a retributive ordering of affairs in a life beyond.

David's life, after parting with Jonathan and his separation from office in the service of the King, is one of strange alternations, and singular adventures; and it is evident that these events and adventures have furnished occasion for some of the most striking of his psalms. The titles of these Psalms, we must remember, are not of Divine inspiration, yet some of them doubtless were prefixed by David himself in after years, and represent with perfect truth the occasion of their composition, and while the narrative throws light upon the psalm, much more does the psalm illuminate the

narrative, and open up the condition of mind, and the spiritual experience of the man while passing through the scenes described.*

The first place of rest the fugitive found was in the tabernacle, at a place called "Nob," of which we have had no mention before, but which, by this time, had come to be a city of priests. There his appearance creates some alarm,—for he is alone (his men apparently keeping aloof), and probably travel-stained, footsore, and hungry. The priest asks why he appears thus? David's answer is a subterfuge, an untruth, such as we would hardly expect from one so full of faith and courage as he. And it has evil consequences, for a servant of Saul was there, an Edomite, who, doubtless heard what David said, and was able to report it to the King. "*Be sure your sin will find you out,*" (Numbers xxxii, 23.) is a saying that all experience shows to be specially applicable to deceit and lying. And it was probably in remembrance of his own sin in this respect that David so emphatically declares, in after years, when, doubtless, he was established as King: "*He that telleth lies shall not tarry in my sight.*" (Psalm ci., 7.) Many other passages in his psalms breathe the same abhorrence of lying and deceit; and probably all these are quickened by the remembrance of this fault into which he was once betrayed, in an exigency.

The compliance of the Priest with his request for bread, though a breach of ecclesiastical law, is referred to by our Lord as right, under the circumstances, David and his men being in a famishing condition. And the Divine Teacher from this circumstance, illustrates a great principle of the administration of God's Kingdom, viz., that *Benevolence* and *Charity* to the needy are higher works than compliance with outward ecclesiastical rule. (Matt. xii., 1, 7.)

But the Priest befriended the fugitive in another matter. David had come away in haste, and was unarmed. "*Was there no spear or sword at hand?*" he enquired. The priest replied: "*There is the sword of Goliath, the Philistine.*" This sword has been deposited in the Tabernacle as a trophy. And

* See note at end of this chapter.

very properly there; for the battle had been distinctly won by a man who had faith in the God of Israel; going out to the conflict in avowed reliance on His aid. Trophies of war in the shape of flags have been deposited for generations in the churches of England, tattered and shot-riddled, and instinct with memories of heroic deeds. And there has been appropriateness in depositing them there, in many cases; for, especially with Nelson, as has been noticed in these studies, prayer to Almighty God for help, and thanksgiving for victory, were well known accompaniments of his operations.

It was most natural then for the Priest to offer David this sword. And a striking event in his career it was that this sword should come back into his hands. It shows, too, that David, by this time, must have grown to be a man of great physical strength, capable of wielding a weapon of that weight with effect. For, otherwise, it would only have been an encumbrance to him. Thus partially armed and with a small supply of food David and his men pass on.

They pass on at first dawn to the Philistine country. It must have been under very heavy stress and fear of close pursuit that he took that direction. For although the Philistine country was close at hand, and the very nearest in which he would be out of Saul's jurisdiction, it was surely a very dangerous region for David,—of all men,—to enter into. And David, too, carrying Goliath's sword!

This, doubtless, was the reason of his feigning madness. For, surely, the Philistines would argue, no sane man, who had done what David had done, and carrying what David did, would venture down here. It was to Gath he went; and he was recognized at once, for Gath was very near that valley of Elah where the famous conflict had taken place. No wonder the people of the city cried out: "*Is not this David—the King of the land?*" (for so, very naturally, they called him). And he certainly would have been killed, and his men with him, (for what could these people think, but that he had come down with some hostile intent), had he not feigned madness of such a wretched and pitiable sort that he became an object of commiseration to the people. And that he was so pitied is evident. For when the men of Gath brought him

before the King of the city, (the Mayor—as we would call him), doubtless, to get him condemned to death, the chief answered “*Lo,—ye see the man is mad ! Shall this fellow come into my house ?*”

So, then, if he was mad,—according to the superstition of early times—he had to be treated with a sort of reverence and awe. They dared not kill such men.

They gave them, indeed—as is evident from the New Testament, a far larger amount of liberty than is ever customary now. And in the use of such liberty, David speedily took his departure from Gath, and made his way to the rough hill country, lying between Philistia and the upland settled districts of Judah, a region well known to him.

DAVID AT THE HEAD OF AN ARMED BAND.

David's life, from this time, assumes an altogether new aspect ; and in nothing does the power of the Spirit of God appear in so marked a degree as in his conduct during this period of his life. For he becomes, apparently, without desiring it, the captain and leader of a band of persons, who under another leader might have become dangerous outlaws ; such as have, in all ages, been the terror of orderly and industrious people, and who, not seldom, occasion alarm, even to an established government. Not that those who resorted to David were such at the beginning, for many of them undoubtedly were not. But such a life as they led, and especially that they were outlaws, could not but tend to rapid demoralization. In the natural course of events, as all experience shows, they would become plunderers, and some of them even murderers, unless their captain was a man under higher and better influences, a just, merciful and godly man, and such we know was the main course of David's life and purpose during this chequered period.

When David, and the few men with him, escaped to the region before mentioned he made his way to the great cave Adullam, one of the largest caves of a region abounding in caves. He saw that it afforded an admirable place of shelter

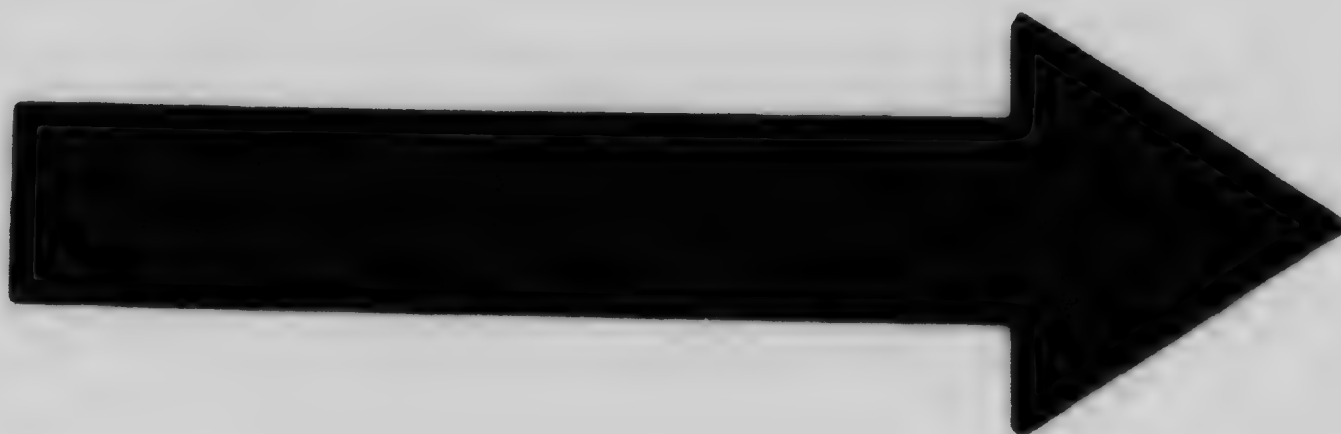
for one like himself and his band, who might at any time be pursued by a much superior force. A region of ravines, rocky fastnesses, and caves would enable a small number of men to hide themselves and move about in the night, so that it would be impossible to capture them, no matter even if the pursuers outnumbered them ten to one. And the character of this region, and also that to which he subsequently fled, near the shores of the Dead Sea, needs to be borne in mind, in considering some of the events described. Then the truth of the narrative stands out sharp and clear. Otherwise some of the incidents of Saul's pursuit are difficult to understand, especially by persons who have never traversed such a country. But one brought up in the Highlands of Scotland, where Prince Charles eluded his pursuers so long, or among the fastnesses of North Wales, or in the mountainous regions of Switzerland, can perfectly appreciate incidents which puzzle persons who have never seen anything but plains and open country.

This Cave of Adullam, let us remember, was in the tribe of Judah, and not more than thirty miles from Bethlehem.

Naturally enough,—(and this is one of the touches that abound in these chronicles, and demonstrate their truth)—his father and brothers hear of his having taken refuge there. Probably David had sent a message to Bethlehem to ask a supply of provisions from his father. For provisions would be his great want, and, very naturally, his father and brothers, determine to go down and see him, doubtless carrying provisions with them.

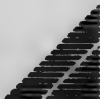
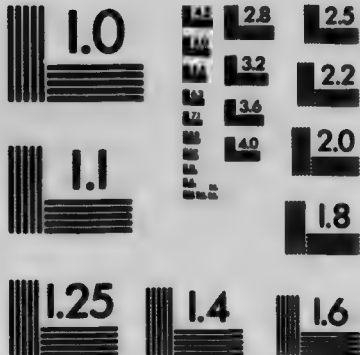
It is evident, however, that their going down to see David must have become known to the King. It could hardly be otherwise. There are always people who are glad to be spies upon the king's enemies; and the departure of Jesse and his wife and sons from a small place like Bethlehem could not but be noticed. Note that *his mother* went with the rest : (Chap. xxii., v. 3), another true touch of nature, for how could it be in the woman's heart to refrain from going to see a son who was in such danger ?

But Jesse and his wife could not possibly remain with



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David under such circumstances. Yet it was dangerous to return, for the king's deadly enmity against any that sheltered or befriended David had been terribly shown in his massacre of the priests.

David, therefore, took his father and mother, making a long detour by the region South of the Dead Sea, into the country of Moab. There he prevailed on the king of Moab to allow his father and mother to abide under his protection for a time, while he returned to his stronghold in Judah.

The man of godliness and piety is here as conspicuous as the man who honors his father and mother.

Before David took refuge in the cave of Adullam there had gathered about him, as has been said, a number of men of a very mixed sort.

The character of these men is graphically told in the second verse of Chapter xxii.

And every one that was in distress;—and every one that was in debt;—and every one that was discontented; gathered themselves to him.

These are the kind of people who in all ages have gathered round outlaw chiefs, such, for example, as the famous Robin Hood of our English history, or Rob Roy of Scotland; or William Tell of Switzerland; not necessarily men of evil character, by any means, but men out of humor with the times, or the government, as many good men might well be under such a capricious tyrant as Saul had become;—or, perhaps, debtors who, though honest, were persecuted by exacting usurers,—or restless and discontented spirits, bitter because, “The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune” had gone against them, or perhaps discontented with the quiet life of the farm. Such were the men who gradually gathered, as it is expressed,—about David;—the greater part, no doubt, young men; many of them impelled by the spirit of adventure such as sends lads to sea in these days,—or to join the army; and ready for any daring enterprise their captain might lead them to. Many of them, doubtless, brought weapons with them; for we read, shortly after, of numbers of them having swords. And it is evident that from time to time they were drilled in the use of the arms they

had, and organized as a military band. At first there were about four hundred of them; but the number afterwards increased to six hundred.

And now being at the head of such a force, what does David do?

Every instinct of human nature would prompt him to engage in hostility against Saul. For he had been shamefully treated; his life had been twice attempted, he had been driven away from civilized society, the people that befriended him had been massacred. Saul's enmity had become implacable. Moreover, David had been anointed king and captain by the prophet of God; he had therefore a right to the throne, and there could be no doubt that once engaged in an enterprise against such a king as Saul had become, there would gather around him, not hundreds of outcasts, but thousands of the best and bravest in the country. And with David's military genius there could be little doubt of success.

Everything, humanly speaking, conspired to suggest this course; and in nearly every case known to history, this is what would have been done. But David was a man directed by the Spirit of the Lord. And, thus guided, he displayed a spirit of forbearance and forgiveness, of magnanimity and generosity, that raise our conceptions of what the influence of the Spirit can do in subduing the baser passions of a man and elevating his character to a height which naturally is far beyond him. That he had strong passions and even fierce impulses, the subsequent narrative makes clear,—but that he could by God's help subdue them, and bring them into subjection, is equally clear. For, as he subdued the natural temptation to declare hostilities against the king, so equally did he the temptation, incident to all men in his position, to plunder and oppress the peaceful cultivators and farmers of the adjacent settled country. But of this more hereafter.

NOTE TO CHAPTER XIX.

THE CHANGING SCENES IN THE LIFE OF DAVID AS REFLECTED
IN HIS PSALMS.

The fact, and it is an undoubted fact, that in some of the psalms which have almost universally been ascribed to David, there is

what is called a "want of correspondence" with the record of his life, need not trouble any one who will consider that there has been the same want of correspondence in the case of other writers of eminence. Who, for example, reading what is recorded of William Shakespeare, of Stratford, would even imagine that dramas instinct with such universal knowledge of mankind, abounding in such flights of poetic genius, and combining in one set of poems the most marvellous display of imagination, fancy, wit, philosophy, and humor the world has ever seen, could proceed from such a man? Some have been so struck with this as to have propounded the theory that this Shakespeare of Stratford never wrote the plays at all, just as certain literary critics of our time, and for the same reason, have fancied that David never wrote the psalms attributed to him.

But the reasoning is as fallacious in the one case as it is in the other.

What, again, was there in the outward life of such a wandering minstrel as Homer to suggest that such a magnificent epic as the *Iliad*, or the highly romantic poem of the *Odyssey* could have proceeded from him?

Nay, coming down to these very times, was there not a lawyer, of Edinburgh, pursuing sedulously the plodding ways of his profession, who poured forth for years the most remarkable series of romances and novels of modern times,—his own neighbors and friends never dreaming that he was the author,—there being such a "want of correspondence" in this case also.

But in the case of David, there is much more correspondence, as it is called, than has often been supposed. The psalms bearing his name, and others generally ascribed to him do, beyond doubt, sound all the heights and depths of the spiritual experience of mankind, and reflect the joys and the sorrows, the aspirations and the failures, of a spiritual man in every conceivable condition and circumstance. But this was precisely the experience of David, as recorded in these chronicles. He was poor and unknown; he was exalted to high honor; he had devoted friends; he had bitter enemies; he was hunted as an outlaw; he ascended the throne; he displayed splendid virtues; he committed dreadful sins. From the beginning to the end of his life he passed through the most striking series of changes recorded of any man in history. This is so well known that it need not be dilated upon.

Now, bearing in mind the natural poetic temperament of the man, is it not evident that the Divine Spirit used these powers and experiences for the purpose of bringing forth these most remarkable compositions for the quickening, comforting, warning, guiding and teaching of godly-minded people, in all circumstances and for all future time, rendering the plain and prosaic facts of life in so highly poetical a form that they seize upon the heart, fasten the attention, and kindle the spiritual powers of men to a degree and in a manner that has never been paralleled since the world began.

That this has been so, as a matter of fact, is beyond dispute. And to a thoughtful mind, there is in all this the irresistible conviction that while David's personality is truly reflected in these psalms, there is in them, as was suggested by our Lord Himself (Mark

xii.: 26), manifestation of the power of the Holy Ghost;—a suggestion which at once does away with human limitations, opens up infinite possibilities, and makes things easy of comprehension, which, apart from this consideration, are obscure and contradictory.

Indeed, if Divine influence and inspiration are set aside from the Book of Psalms, they become the greatest enigma that has ever baffled the intellect of mankind. But they are no enigma. They speak to the willing soul with no uncertain voice. And though the human instrument is David or one like him, the impelling power is the Spirit of God.

CHAPTER XX.

FURTHER EXPERIENCES OF DAVID AND HIS BAND OF SIX HUNDRED.

(I. Samuel, Chap. xxii. to xxxi.)

Besides the restless and discontented men that are spoken of as gathering to David, there were others of a different stamp; and having more natural affinity with such a one as he. A rising prophet appears among them named Gad, who afterwards was so closely associated with David as to be called *the King's seer*. (II. Chron. xxix., 25.) And he, speaking in his quality as prophet, warned David *not to abide in the hold*, but to betake himself to some other part of the territory of Judah. This David did, and abode for some time in a forest called Hareth, access to which was evidently difficult. There were *strongholds* in this forest (Chap. xxiii.), the region being one of mountains and wilderness fastnesses, easy for a man, and even a numerous band, to hide in from pursuit. And there, doubtless, they would find game for provisions, the life they led bearing a singular resemblance to that of the English forest outlaw before named.

But besides this prophet, there came unto him a priest who had escaped from Saul's barbarous massacre, a son of the priest who had befriended him.

From him David learned of the massacre, and bitterly bewailed that he had been the innocent occasion of it. He promised this priest (Abiathar by name) protection in touching terms. "*Abide thou with me; fear not; for he that seeketh my life seeketh thy life; but with me thou shalt be in safeguard!*" (Chap. xxii., 23.)

That this was fulfilled we know, for Abiathar continued in the office of high priest up to David's death.

But there soon arose an occasion in which David could use his band in the service of his country. The Philistines made

a raid into the Israelitish territory about harvest time,—and robbed the threshing-floors round about the frontier town of Keilah. To rob the farmers of their wheat harvest was the old method of the Midianite hordes in Gideon's time. (Judges vi., 5.), but hitherto, this aggravating form of depredation has not been heard of as practised by the Philistines. For their country is good for crops. But David hears of it now, and he naturally desires to drive these marauders out of the country. He must, however, *enquire of the Lord*. It may not be the Lord's will to work deliverance by such a band as David's. It is not always wise to follow inclination, even if the end appears plainly desirable. *In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths*, said the wise king. (Prov. iii., 6.) For a man to *lean to his own understanding* is often to court trouble.

But the counsel of the Lord agreed with David's own inclination. *The Lord said, Go, smite the Philistines, and save Keilah*; (Chap. xxiii., 2), which he did, and brought away much spoil of cattle; a useful spoil, indeed, in his circumstances; for of all things the difficulty of provisioning his band would press on him heavily day by day.

But now comes a story which is a revelation of the weaker and darker side of human nature. Yet it bears an undoubted stamp of truth. This city of Keilah had walls and gates. For a time after the driving off of the Philistines, David and his men lodged there, being no doubt entertained by the citizens they had delivered. But spies and busy-bodies are always at work, and word of this is brought to Saul. Now, had a particle of reasonableness been in the King's breast at the time, he would have been well pleased that David had driven off these old and inveterate enemies of Israel. He might, indeed, have taken this as an opportunity of reconciliation with David.

But no; Jealousy and hatred assert themselves once more;—and all he says is—“*God hath delivered him into my hand, for he is shut up in a town of gates and bars!*” (Chap. xxiii., v. 7.) Thus have men in all ages, with gross impiety, imagined that the God of righteousness works with them in schemes of injustice and wickedness. But Saul was wrong. His intended victim had a nearer access to God than he, for

God's priest was with him. Saul was utterly out of touch with the Divine will, in these later years of his life, and, as we have already read, God refused to answer him either by *dream*, by prophet, or by Urim. How could a man expect an answer from God while living and thinking as he did. (See Chap. xviii., v. 12 *et al.*)

David, on the other hand, was living a life of faith and obedience. He honoured God's ordinances now, as he did to the end of his days; It was through the Divinely appointed medium of Urim (for the *Ephod* which the priest brought with him undoubtedly had this mysterious breastplate attached to it,) that David sought counsel of God. And his prayer is noticeable, like some others recorded, for its simplicity and its undoubting faith. The holy men of old spoke to Almighty God with all reverence, yet with the familiar confidence of intimate fellowship. Thus, it has been said, did Luther pray. For David said: "*O Lord God of Israel; thy servant hath certainly heard that Saul seeketh to come to Keilah to destroy the city for my sake. Will the men of Keilah deliver me up into his hand? Will Saul come down, as thy servant hath heard? I beseech thee tell thy servant!*"

Thus, as an obedient child to a good father, did this persecuted fugitive pour out his heart to the Lord; and thus did he prove how sure a *refuge* God was to them that trust him. (Psalm lxii.)

For the answer came at once. *Saul will come down. And the men of Keilah will deliver thee up.* (v. 11, 12.)*

* How this answer, and others like it, was given; that is, how the breastplate of Urim became a medium of Divine communication, has not been revealed. And it is vain to *enquire*, or *guess*, or *speculate*. For, if we knew, we, in this dispensation, would certainly be no wiser. Suffice it that the Divine will could, at that time, be thus made known. And as to ourselves, to all sincere and believing souls has been given the promise of the Holy Spirit to them that seek for Him.

It is noteworthy here that neither of the events actually occurred which it was stated *would* occur in the answer to David's enquiry. But this is the most natural thing possible. For David took care to get away from Keilah at once, so that the inhabitants should have no opportunity of delivering him up. And Saul, hearing of this (and he was sure to hear of it), did not go down to Keilah at all. But it is evident that the Divine declaration was of what

The intention to deliver David up was as discreditable to the men of Keilah as the intention to kill him was to Saul. There was everything to make them honor and respect the man who had given them such deliverance. But then, what about the King? The knowledge that they would have *him* to reckon with, turned the scale against David, and overcame every sentiment of honor and gratitude. That most cynical saying, "gratitude is a lively sense of *favours to come*," is only too often exemplified. In fact it would never otherwise have become a saying at all. The conduct of the men of Keilah was only too much "the way of the world," though we have noticed a conspicuous instance to the contrary in the men of Jabesh Gilead, who, in grateful remembrance of Saul's delivering *them*, took down the dead bodies of himself and sons from the wall of Bethshan and gave them honorable burial.

David is once more in the wilderness of forest and mountain, which characterizes the southern and eastern part of Judah. His early life had doubtless made him familiar with the *strongholds* (v. 19) in these woods and wild ravines. (Chap. xxiv., 3.) He knew where the caves were, and the paths about these fastnesses, and how to scale these *rocks of the wild goats*. (v. 2.)

Here his dear and tried friend Jonathan comes to see him—and again Jonathan speaks touching words of friendship and encouragement. "*He went to David into the wood* AND STRENGTHENED HIS HAND IN GOD! *And he said unto him, Fear not; for the hand of Saul my father shall not find thee. And thou shalt be king over Israel, and I shall be next unto thee. And that also Saul my father knoweth!*" (Chap. xxiii; 16, 17.) Alas! alas! that the hopes of this brave and devoted friend should be cut off on the fatal field of Gilboa. And

both Saul and the people of Keilah *intended* to do; and of what they would have done had not David left the city. This is one of the cases (and there are such in all histories) in which a brief declaration needs a few additional words to make it correspond with actual facts. Thus, in the present case, the Divine answer to David evidently includes this idea, *If you do not leave Keilah, Saul will come down, and the men of the city will deliver you up.*

who can tell what an influence for good Jonathan might have been had his hope of being next to the king at a future day been fulfilled. For Jonathan, beyond question, was a far superior man to any that David had about him after he ascended the throne. But again we must say,—how profound is the mystery of God's ways!—Jonathan slain, while such men as Joab and Abishai are suffered to live!—

The readiness of other men besides the men of Keilah to deliver David up was only too conspicuous in this evil time. The people of the wilderness village of Ziph were ready to betray him,—though he had done them no hurt: Come down, they sent word to Saul,—and *our part shall be to deliver David into the King's hand.* A mean and treacherous part, indeed. But it is human nature to curry favor with the king; who himself was as mean as they,—for he thanked them for *having compassion on him!*

But though Saul boasted that he would seek David *through the thousands of Judah:* and gave orders for all his *haunts and hiding-places* (Chap. xxiii., 22, 23) to be searched; though he was on the track of David continually, being on *one side of the mountain* when David was on the other, he never was able to apprehend him. For David had his spies also, who watched the king's movements, and gave timely warning. And there was the All-Seeing One, watching them both. But while this close pursuit was going on, an incursion of the Philistines again calls for Saul's attention. He, therefore, returned to follow after them, and David went up and dwelt in the strongholds of ENGEDI. Thus God was preserving him continually, and in many of these changes we can see the foundation of ideas fully opened up in the Psalms.

The forbearance of David with Saul when the King followed him into rocks and fastnesses of Engedi has already been referred to. Let us look at it a little more in detail. (Chap. xxiv.)

This region of caves admits of numbers of men lying concealed, and Saul, it is evident, although he has so large a number with him, has not been able to see David or any of his band. He supposes himself in perfect safety, and David

at a distance, and therefore hesitates not to enter a cave alone. But David and some of his band are there. Saul, therefore, is absolutely in his power. It needed but the word and his career was ended. And David's men could not understand why he forbore; judging according to the ways of men. They venture to reproach him, saying: *Behold the day of which the Lord said unto thee,—I will deliver him into thy hand.* Nothing of that sort has been recorded, and the men had probably no ground for saying it. But that Saul was in his hand, is unquestionable.

But God was not only watching over David's safety in Providence, but He was guiding and guarding his spirit in the order of Divine grace. So, then, instead of revengeful thoughts, which were natural, a higher order of thought arose within him; viz., that of *forgiveness*. This is perhaps the highest order of virtue of which regenerate man is capable, and David exercised it now. He spared Saul's life, only cutting off the skirt of his robe, as evidence that he had had it in his power to kill him, had he so pleased. Saul left the cave; and, now, being still within hearing, though on the other side of the deep gorge, David cries out: *My Lord the King! Wherefore hearest thou men's words against me: Thine eyes have seen how that the Lord had delivered thee into mine hand, and some bade me kill thee. . . . Moreover, my father, (how tender and loving these words of David become, as he goes on), see the skirt of thy robe in my hand! For in 'I cut off the skirt of thy robe, and killed thee not, know . . . and see that there is neither evil nor transgression in mine hand. . . . The Lord judge between me and thee!—and the Lord avenge me of thee, but mine hand shall not be upon thee.*

After whom is the King of Israel come out? After whom dost thou pursue? After a dead dog, after a flea.

The Lord, therefore, be judge, and see—and plead my cause, and deliver me out of thy hand. (Chap. xxiv., 9 to 15.)

After such an outpouring of an honest soul as this, the echoes of which plainly appear in some of the psalms. (see psalm xxxi., for instance), Saul would have been a worse man than he was, had he not broken down and confessed himself wrong. He cried out:—"*Is this thy voice, my son*

David? And he lifted up his voice and wept;—and said; “Thou art more righteous than I. For if a man find his enemy, will he let him go well away? Wherefore the Lord reward thee good for that thou hast done unto me this day!”

Then Saul adds,—surely after a pause of amity, these remarkable words,—(the first intimation he had ever given of knowledge that David would succeed him)—and now behold I know well that thou shalt surely be King! and that the kingdom of Israel shall be established in thine hand. Swear, now, therefore, unto me that thou wilt not cut off my seed after me, and that thou wilt not destroy my name out of my father's house.” (v. 17 to 21.)

Alas for the once powerful king—to be reduced to beg for terms from the man he was hunting to destroy. David, of course, swears; and surely then there should have been peace between them. Might not this be a turning-point in Saul's later history? Might he not cease his persecutions of David, take him into his confidence, give him command of his army, and spend the rest of his days in amity and peace? Surely he might. But he did not. There is no sign of anything of the kind at the close of the interview, and one may ponder again with something like awe the state of mind into which this unfortunate man had fallen, when the Spirit of the Lord had departed from him!

Each of them, therefore, the persecuted and the persecutor, went their way. In the simple words of the narrative, “*Saul went home;*” (a thousand pities, alas! he did not take David with him), “*but David and his men gat them up into the hold.*”

It might surely be supposed that Saul, even if he could not reinstate David, would cease from persecuting him. And this he did for a time, during which Samuel, the aged prophet and Judge, died. His death had no influence on the course of events, for he had long ceased to have anything to do with them. He even refrained from any endeavour to bring the king to a better mind concerning David, when David fled to him at Ramah, after the violent assault upon him in the king's house. Why he did not do what one might naturally expect he would, we are not expressly told.

But it would seem as if, being a prophet, he had intimation of Saul's determined perseverance in a course of wrongdoing. And he knew that Saul had been tried, found wanting, and had been rejected.

So Samuel died; and all the Israelites were gathered together, and lamented him, and buried him in his house at Ramah. And as, in the same verse, it is intimated that David arose and went down to the wilderness of Paran, it seems probable that he was present at the funeral, and was allowed to depart in peace.

But, some time after,—how long the narrative does not inform us,—the demon of jealousy again became dominant in Saul. Some mischievous people from the border of the wilderness take the trouble to go up to Saul in his old home, at Gibeah, and inform him that David is in their neighbourhood. The region is of the same wild character as that before described, and the incident that follows is of the same character as that which took place at Engedi.

Saul again takes a chosen band—three thousand men, and again they go to seek David and his men upon the rocks of the wild goats.

Again he fell into David's power—for David knew the region better than Saul or his officers) and again David spared his life. And it came about in this way. Saul and his men, confident in their numbers, lay sleeping in camp, with Abner, his trusted officer, and others, about him.

David proposes to go down to the camp; and Abishai—of whom we shall hear later on—volunteers to go with him on the dangerous errand.

They go. They arrive, and find all asleep, Saul with the rest. Abishai whispers to David—*Let me smite him to the earth; and he adds, with characteristic boldness. I will not need to smite him a second time.* (Chap. xxvi., 8.) But no, the Spirit of God is with David again,—and he replies,—*The Lord forbid that I should stretch forth my hand against him!* But he added, *take his spear*, which was stuck in the ground at his bolster, and the cruse of water,—and let us go. And go they did,—with these trophies in their hand,—neither Saul nor his guard awaking. For, it is added, a deep

sleep from the Lord was fallen upon them. This apparently, was a direct Divine interposition.

Crossing over the ravine, and climbing to a secure place on the other side, David cries out loudly enough to awaken the sleeping king and his chief captain, 'Abner! Answerest thou not?' (those who know these regions, know how easily it could be done.) When Abner awakes he cries out, *Who art thou that criest to the King?* David replies, with biting sarcasm, *Art not thou a valiant man? And why hast thou not kept thy Lord the King? Now, see where the King's spear is, and the cruse of water that was at his bolster. As the Lord liveth, ye are worthy to die, because ye have not kept your master, the Lord's anointed.*

Abner says not a word; for, doubtless, he was struck dumb with astonishment and shame.

And again a colloquy ensues between the King and David, almost in the same words as the other—for history repeats itself not only at long, but at short, intervals. The King cries out, *Is this thy voice—my son David?* (We may notice again the same softening of heart as took place formerly) and again David cries out,—*Wherefore does my lord pursue after his servant? What have I done?* But he goes on to say what he had not said before. *If the Lord have stirred thee up against me, let him accept an offering,* (evidently a sacrifice of atonement, which could be offered as the priest was with David) *but if they be the children of men, cursed be they before the Lord,—for they have driven me out this day from my inheritance, saying, Go, Serve other gods.*

Again we hear echoes of the psalms, and we can understand how David would feel towards men who stirred up strife between him and the King; and see that this which looks like an imprecation was really a prophecy, or expression of what such wickedness deserved and would assuredly bring—unless repented of.

But Saul acknowledges his wrong, *I have sinned,* he says, and he adds,—*I will no more do thee harm—for I have played the fool!* This promise he faithfully kept, and they parted to see each other no more.

CHAPTER XXI.

FURTHER SCENES IN DAVID'S LIFE—NABAL AND ABIGAIL—
HIS SERVICE WITH THE PHILISTINES—HIS EXPE-
DITION AGAINST THE AMALEKITES.

(I. Samuel xxv., to end.)

The later years of the life of Saul, and the life of David during the same period, present a perfect contrast in these two respects; Saul's life was one of estrangement from, and persistent sin against God; relieved by two transient instances of tenderness and good feeling towards David. David's life, at the same period, was one of obedience to God,—and goodness to man, but clouded by an outburst of revengeful anger against the mean sheep-farmer, Nabal; and, what is more difficult to account for, his entering the service of the Philistine king, and being ready to take arms against his own country.*

These incidents in the life of David before he became king are very worthy of note. The first is related in Chapter xxv. with as great fulness of detail and as vividly picturesque an effect as the story of the conflict with Goliath.

We see before us the sheepmaster, Nabal, moving about amongst his men at shearing time, in the great plain of Southern Judea, like an Australian rancher of our own times; a rich man, but a churl, and withal somewhat of a

* Yet, these two lives are types of the lives of the godly and ungodly of our own times. On the one hand we have the man the tenor of whose life is of constant estrangement from God, and while animated by no high motives in his general dealings with men, occasionally does things highly commendable; on the other, the man whose faith in, and love to God are manifest in a general course of consecration and obedience, who yet, by stress of temptation, may do and say at times, things which are inconsistent with a godly profession; which things are invariably severely judged.

fool ;—we see, also, his beautiful and discreet wife, Abigail, taking her part in the affairs of the household and farm, like many a capable farmer's wife of our own day. David is also before us, sending men with kindly greetings of peace, reminding Nabal that his shepherds and flocks had been protected by his band, which was perfectly true, and asking for some little supply of provisions, at his discretion—*whatsoever cometh to thine hand*;—as he expressed it,—*for we come in a good day*. A very different thing is this, let it be remembered, from a forced contribution,—and very different behaviour was that which David told of from what might have been expected from such a band, indicating plainly in what strict and orderly discipline they were kept.

And now, can we not see this rich (but foolish) churl turning away from David's messengers, as he cries, "*Who is David? and who is the son of Jesse? There be many servants now-a-days that break away every man from his master,—Shall I take my bread and my water; and my flesh which I have killed for my shearers, and give it unto men whom I know not whence they be?*" (Chap. xxv., 10, 11.)

Thus speaks the churl;—and thus stands out the fool;—for the least exercise of common sense would tell him that David's request was not unreasonable. His pastoral uplands were not far from the Amalekite country, from whence he and his flocks were exposed to perpetual plundering raids. But David, with such a band as he had about him, *were*,—as Nabal's own young men expressed it,—*as a wall unto them both by night and by day all the while* they were keeping the sheep.

David's defence of Nabal's flock gave him a reasonable claim to some recompense in the way of provisions ; and none but a churl would have refused it. But what a *fool* the man shewed himself to be, to make an enemy of a man at the head of such a band. For his reply was a gross insult to a man who had occupied such a high position in the land as David had, even if he was an outlaw *at present*.

David felt the insult keenly, and all the human nature in him was stirred;—stirred, indeed, far beyond the bounds of the anger which any good man might well feel. For he

threatened dire vengeance upon Nabal. He could forgive Saul,—but this man he would not forgive.

He said to his men. (v. 13.) *Gird ye on every man his sword.* And they did so. *And David girded on his sword;* gathering about him *four hundred* of his band for a march to Nabal's pastures, his purpose being to slay Nabal, and every male he had about him. A terrible purpose indeed, and showing an extremity of passion that contrasted violently with the gentleness and kindness he had shown to Saul. But let no man think this unnatural in such a man as David has shown himself to be. It is very natural, indeed,—it is the very working of the natural man when human nature is allowed the sway, instead of the Spirit of God. But David was mercifully prevented from carrying his deadly purpose into effect.

For here, now, appears on the scene, the prudent and tactful wife of this churlish fool. Did we not know that such things are common enough in our day, we might wonder how it could possibly be that such a man could ever have got such a wife. For his own men said of him: *He is such a son of Belial that a man cannot speak to him!* (A true portrait, doubtless.) This wise woman scents the danger, acts promptly to meet it, gathers the needful supply her husband had refused, loads asses with them, and sends servants with them to meet David;—adding that she would shortly follow.

Which doing, and descending the hill, into the valley of his encampment, she meets David with his men.

And one cannot but admire the wisdom and tact displayed by this good woman; and notice, moreover, the admirable style of her address, as indicating a cultivation which we are little apt to associate with her time. The address of this woman may help us to understand what the real condition of her times was, and how utterly false is the conception that such poetry as is ascribed to David in the book of Psalms is too good for his age.

Meeting David, she lights from her ass, makes the obeisance due to a distinguished personage, and begs him to put the blame upon her rather than upon her husband—(she holding herself probably responsible for the provisions of the

house). Her language is as wise, and its style as beautiful as any high-born dame of the present day could employ, and it bears an evident stamp of reality.

Let not my lord, I pray thee, she begins, *regard this man of Belial, this Nabal; for as his name is so is he*; (Nabal, let us remember, means fool). *Fool is his name and folly is with him.* (v. 25.) Thus does she mollify the wrath of the outlaw chief, and then adds with infinite tact,—*But I, thine handmaid, saw not the young men of my lord, whom thou didst send*: (implying that if she had seen them the provisions would have been sent). David evidently shows by his countenance and bearing that her address is moving him.—So she goes on: *Now, therefore, my lord, as the Lord hath withholden thee from shedding blood, let thine enemies, and they that seek evil to my lord, be as Nabal.* (Thus does she skilfully draw off his thoughts to his other and more powerful enemies.) Then she prays him to accept her present; apologises for presuming to come,—and goes on, with an evident knowledge of who David was, and what had been said of him;—

For the Lord will certainly make my lord a sure house, because my lord fighteth the battles of the Lord, and evil hath not been found in thee. Again she reverts to Saul and those who consort with him in persecuting David. *Yet a man is risen to pursue thee, and to seek thy soul: But the soul of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of life with the LORD thy God: and the souls of thine enemies, them shall he sling out, as from the middle of a sling.* (How natural and beautiful is this, and how tactful the reference to David's great exploit.) Then she goes on, her language rising to increasing pathos and beauty, "*And it shall come to pass when the Lord shall have done to my lord according to all the good that he hath spoken concerning thee, and shall have appointed thee ruler over Israel,* (here she rises into a strain of the highest wisdom), *that this shall be no grief to thee,—either that thou hast shed blood causeless, or that my lord hath avenged himself*: Last of all, she makes one brief plea for herself, *But when the Lord shall have dealt well with my lord,—then remember thine handmaid!*

An address, is not this, equal to anything that has ever

been spoken by any person, in any language; equal to that most touching address of Judah, when he pleads before Joseph. Thus does this wise and beautiful daughter of Judah also plead.

As for David, one may imagine the tumult of emotion which would rise and swell within his passionate nature, as this beautiful creature knelt before him and poured out her heart in supplication.

Up to the moment of meeting her, his soul was chafing at the insult put upon him, and burning with desire to avenge it,—(for then, he it remembered, he was dominated by human passion), but as this woman spoke, the tide of feeling turned with a rush; revenge was silenced,—his heart was touched; and, finally, his purpose was abandoned; then rapidly succeeded admiration for the woman's wisdom, and finally, profound gratitude that he had been prevented by her from a deed of blood, which would have dishonoured his name for ever. So he exclaims, fully recovering the tone of piety which was the general habit of his mind, "*Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, which sent thee this day to meet me! And blessed be thy advice; and blessed be thou, which hast kept me this day from coming to shed blood, and from avenging myself with mine own hand.*"

So David received her present,—saying: *Go up in peace to thine house: See, I have hearkened to thy voice, and have accepted thy person.* How different all this from the behaviour of many an outlaw, who would have taken her present, carried her off, and revenged himself on Nabal too.

She did return. But Nabal was indulging in a drunken merrymaking. She, therefore, said nothing till the morning, but when she told of his narrow escape, his very heart sank within him, and he became as a stone. From this condition he never recovered, and died within ten days.

One cannot wonder that after this David should desire so good and so wise a woman to be his wife. Saul had taken David's wife, Michal, away from him; but Abigail was a woman worthy in every respect to be the wife of such a man. Nothing is said of the marriage ceremony, except

that she had what would now be called five bridesmaids. (Chap. xxv., 42.)

But the fact that a woman in her position was willing to become the wife of one in the position in which David then was, indicates that her words respecting his future were not mere compliments, but expressions of a *faith* which she was willing to follow up and prove by her works.

DAVID ENTERS THE SERVICE OF THE PHILISTINES.

(Chap. xxvii.)

It was once said, and put on record, by a profound student of human nature, no less a man than Ignatius Loyola, that a man should never determine upon any important course of action in a time of despondency. All experience proves the wisdom of this saying; and we have an instance of it in this movement of David.

For some reason, which does not appear in the narrative, he has become despondent; a phase of mind which all men of his temperament are exposed to at times, and which is vividly reflected in some of his psalms: "*Oh, my God, my soul is cast down within me.*" (Psalm xlii.), is a cry which is often heard breaking out from him. Yet the depth of a man's sorrow, as a famous modern writer has expressed it (Carlyle), is the measure of the height of his nobleness.

In such a time of despondency, when he *said in his heart, I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul*,—and forgetting to stir up *himself*, as he had stirred up so many others,—to hold fast faith in God:—he went on to say,—"*there is nothing better for me than that I should speedily escape into the land of the Philistines.*" A desperate expedient, indeed, and one that before long placed him in that very difficult position which he might have foreseen was sure to present itself. (This, let us remember, was subsequent to his first visit.) But in all this, David stands out, (as through his whole life),—as a man like other men, sorely tried by circumstances, generally rising superior to them by his faith in God,—but at times being overcome by them, when his faith

failed him. Yet these very failures fitted him to be, under an all-wise guidance and inspiration, an exponent of the religious life in its various phases, such as the world has never seen. For the universal human heart in all ages has responded to the wonderful touches of life contained in his various psalms. We see, then, with sadness and sorrow, this famous Israelite going over to the nearest and most dangerous of all Israel's enemies; and taking his band with him. There he remained sixteen months.

For a time he directed his arms against those mischievous tribes in the South, who were equally enemies to Philistia and to Israel. For the Philistines were a settled and comparatively civilized people, whose harvests and wealth were a coveted prey to the roving bands of the Amalekites and others of the neighbouring wilderness, exactly as rich travellers are to the Bedouins of the same region at this day. In putting down and rooting out these land pirates, he followed out the course prescribed to Saul by Samuel, and for the same reason. And in this he rendered as good service to the king of Philistia as to the king of Israel. So far, good.

But the time came, and David might have foreseen it, when the Philistines turned their arms once more against Israel. (Chap. xxviii., 1.) Then came the crucial trial of David's life;—for Achish of Gath, who had received him, now demanded most naturally, that David should give full proof of his loyalty to Philistia and go out with him to battle.

The answer of David was equivocal, and shows the conflict of feeling in his bosom.—He said to Achish, "*Surely thou shalt know what thy servant shall do*;" an answer that committed him to nothing. For what could be more unnatural than that David should fight against Israel! Even if the question were,—Shall I not turn my force against Saul, and avenge the wrong he has put upon me? as the great general Moreau turned his arms against Napoleon, the answer is that he had already on two decisive occasions refused this.

But at that time he was an independent chief, committed to nothing. Now he is engaged in the service of Philistia;—a terribly false position; but one that bound him to action. The result is shown in Chap. xxix. He consented to go

with the Philistine army,—but his place was—doubtless at his own suggestion—with the rear-guard.

In this he had not sought divine counsel. Thus it would appear as if, like Coriolanus with Rome, and Moreau with Napoleon, he was about to shed the blood of his own countrymen, and contribute to their subjugation.

But from this most unnatural sequence he was saved in an unexpected but most natural manner. The march had scarcely begun when the Philistine *chiefs* found out that David and his band were in the rearguard. The natural consequence followed; jealousy broke out; *What do these Hebrews here?* is the cry. As for this David, *he must return to his place.* He cannot be trusted; for in the heat of battle what more likely than that he will turn against us, and thereby be reconciled to his master? A shrewd and natural forecast, and likely enough in any ordinary man. (v. 4.) The king could not risk what might have become a mutiny of his princes; therefore, very reluctantly, and testifying that David had been loyal and upright, he bids him return. "*I have found no fault with thee,*" he says, "*but the lords favor thee not.*"

Thus did another governor *find no fault* with David's great descendant in after days, yet yielded to the jealous clamour of the chiefs of his nation, who favored him not.

David, as we must think, made the great mistake of still urging that he ought to be allowed to go. There were mixed feelings in this desire; doubtless, loyalty and gratitude to the king who had befriended him; which was right; indignation and anger against his own king and countrymen, who had cast him off. This, though natural, was wrong. It was a parallel case to Coriolanus.

But he was saved from his own great mistake by the good hand of his God upon him. David was not to stain his reputation by fighting against Israel. The king was firm, and David, with his men, rising up early, returned to the land of the Philistines.

ANOTHER EXPEDITION AGAINST THE AMALEKITES.

Arriving at the city of Ziglag, which Achish had assigned him for a dwelling,—David finds a horrible condition of things. The Amalekites had heard of his leaving with the army, had burst suddenly upon Ziglag, smote it, burned it, and carried off all the women captive; David's two wives, and the wives and children of his men, included. A terrible cry and lamentation ensued, and a fierce outbreak of wrath against David, for taking them away. (Chap. xxx., 6.) *They spake, indeed, of stoning him. But he encouraged himself in the Lord his God; sought counsel through the priest,—to pursue or not to pursue. (he had learned the folly of leaning on his own understanding),—received a word to pursue, and he would recover all; organized his band, made so swift a march that one-third of his men could not keep up with the rest; found a half-starved lad left behind sick by the fleeing Amalekite host, got their route from him; and then found them spread out on the plain, eating and drinking and dancing in security, rejoicing over their great spoil.*

We may imagine what followed,—how swift and sudden David's attack—how terrible the slaughter, how complete the victory; also with what joy the captives were rescued, how the wives rejoined their husbands once more, and how the great spoil and plunder was all recovered.

And then we learn of his wise and large hearted decision as to the men who had been left behind at the brook Besor. Some of the men who went to battle loudly objected to any of the spoil being shared with them. But what said David? *The Lord hath given us this victory and spoil: These are our brethren. They have watched over our baggage and provisions. They have done their part. And they shall share alike with us.* Thus spoke the wise and forecasting general, who knew that the subsidiary operations of an army are as important as the actual fighting. And so much did David think of this that when he had the power he made it a statute in Israel, "*As is his part that goeth down to the battle, so shall his part be that tarryeth by the stuff*—i.e., as we would call it—by the commissariat. The history of the Peninsular war strikingly illustrates the wisdom of this statute.

And now comes the very last of the transactions of David in this preparatory and formative period of his life. He is in possession of great spoil. What shall he do with it? Keep it all for himself? Distribute to the Philistines? Or send it to his own people? He decides for the last.

He has recognized the victory and spoil as from the God of Israel. Amongst the people Israel, then, he distributes it. And his generosity embraces a wide area, viz., from Bethel in the north to the farthest extremity of the tribe of Judah in the South, *even all the places where he and his men were wont to haunt!* And this is the last deed of David before he became king.

THE
SECOND BOOK
OF
SAMUEL.

ROMANES THOUGHTS ON RELIGION.

So to speak, the world, throughout its historical period, has been constituted the canvas on which this Divine revelation has been painted—and painted so gradually that not until the process had been going on for a couple of thousand years was it possible to perceive the subject thereof.

PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS.

Why the present chronicle should be called "*The second book of Samuel*," or even "*The second book of Kings*," does not appear in the sacred record itself; and inquiries and speculations as to its authorship are utterly vain. In fact, they are meaningless, when the record is considered,—(and it is rightly so considered)—to have been guided, and influenced in composition, by the Holy Ghost. This is the all-important matter, and Christian people desiring to use the word as a means of truth and spiritual enlightenment cannot too earnestly bear it in mind. *Holy men of old spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost*: this is a saying which obviously applies to the narratives and biographies as well as to the prophetic portions of the word.

For, this being so, the narratives and biographies themselves will, in the first place, be true to life and fact; and, in the next place, they will be pertinent—that is—they will be for *teaching, correction and instruction* in righteousness. The question of the mere human authorship then fades into insignificance, for, if it could be determined with absolute accuracy, and no one pretends it can; it would not alter by one jot or tittle, the truth and authority of the narratives, nor their to careful attention as true and pertinent records. But as we proceed further with the study of these books of Scripture, commonly called historical, we shall see that, properly speaking, they are not of the nature of *histories* at all, for they contain but mere fragments of what must have taken place during long periods of time in the varied fortunes of the Israelitish people. And very many things are entirely omitted which are apparently essential to the understanding of various narratives—as narratives. For example, the First Book of Samuel closes with an account of the invasion of the land of Israel by the Philistines and of the defeat and death of Saul. Something more must have transpired in consequence of this Philistine invasion, but not a word is said of it.

Evidence *

The same thing is noticeable of the biographies; which leads to the conclusion that a superintending Mind or Providence was over the composition of the narratives, guiding the workers or compilers to select only such events, dialogues or conversations, as should strictly subserve, either directly or indirectly, the main purpose of spiritual instruction and enlightenment. In other words, these narratives are not merely to subserve in their readers the pursuit of knowledge, *per se*, but the pursuit of such knowledge as will have a definite bearing upon conduct and character, as related both to the Supreme Judge and Father, and to the men by whom we are surrounded, and with whom we have to do.

It will be noticed that in referring to various Psalms, they have been taken, according to their titles, to be almost wholly the composition of David. This, as is well known, is contrary to the opinion of many modern critics. But then, these critics have been so much in the habit of contradicting one another, and of putting forth theories as to the books of the Bible that are manifestly ill-considered, ill-founded, and some of them positively absurd, that their contradiction of things that have been received without question by the scholars of many generations, is entitled to very little weight. It is with the theories of these critics as it is with the objections of unbelievers generally, that, whatever may be the difficulties attending the reception of the established and orthodox views, the difficulties of rejecting them are enormously greater—if not insurmountable.

CHAPTER I.

DAVID'S ELEGY ON THE DEATH OF SAUL AND JONATHAN.

(2 Samuel I.)

Saul being dead, David is king: king, certainly, *de jure*, that is by right; for we may surely conclude that the Divine anointing of many years before will now take effect in his assuming the throne. But no. It would seem as if the life of David had been purposely ordained by Divine Providence on a plane of crosses and contradictions, thus fitting him, as has been said, to be an exponent by poetical genius, under God's Spirit, of the sorrows and vexations, the hopes and fears, the despair and the triumph, which characterise this troubled human life we have to live, from which troubles we make so many efforts to escape in vain. For, no sooner was David in a position to claim the kingdom, than vexatious difficulties arose which were not overcome for many succeeding years.

David, we remember, returned victorious, laden with spoil from his expedition against the plunderers of the Desert, and it was to Ziklag, the city that had been given him by the Philistine king, Achish, and two days after his return, that a man came, with clothes rent, and earth on his head, with doleful tidings of the defeat of the army of Israel with great slaughter and the death of Saul and Jonathan: a most disastrous day, indeed, for Israel, one of the darkest in its history.

But this foolish messenger, judging of David by the average of human nature, supposes he will be well pleased to learn of Saul's death—Saul, his deadly enemy; who had sought his destruction so persistently. A striking passage in Scott's "Quentin Durward" illustrates this, in which the king is made to say that "the very sweetest sight a king can see, is the face of a dead enemy." Such, in truth, is the way of the world. And the man counts on this,—and, thinking of

the reward that David was sure to give, tells a lying tale of his being the man who slew the king,—when he was sore pressed and wounded,—and at the king's own request. The man must have been near when Saul was in his extremity : *sore wounded of the archers* (as we read in the previous chapter), and, doubtless, heard Saul entreat his armour-bearer to slay him. This was the foundation of his lying tale ; and he thought to curry favor by telling it. He had certainly seen Saul die, for he brought his crown and bracelet as a proof.

But David received the story in a different spirit from what the man imagined. The story of the king's death was not sweet to him. Twice he had had the king in his power, and twice he had spared his life, forgiving him. Was he then, the man to rejoice in the king's death in a day of disaster and defeat ?

Nay. When the will of the great Napoleon was opened it was found he had left a legacy to a miscreant who had attempted to assassinate the Duke of Wellington; a piece of meanness almost incredible, did we not know that with transcendent intellectual gifts there was combined in this many-sided man, a terrible debasement in morals. But in this Napoleon was not alone. Was not our own Lord Bacon, "the greatest, wisest, *meanest* of mankind ?" Looking at such men, and at such men as David, one may consider which qualities will give the most lasting fame. Whatever may be the case with regard to this world, when we stretch our thoughts to that eternal and infallible judgment which awaits every man, there can be no doubt as to what that issue will be.

How many will then be *weighed* in the Divine balances and be *found wanting* !

David ordered the young man to be executed as a murderer on his own confession. He had slain *the Lord's anointed*. But he was sorely troubled—as a true patriot—for the disaster that had befallen the nation. He rent his clothes ; his men rent theirs ; *they mourned and wept and fasted until even*.

Few races have been so distinguished for this noble quality of patriotism as have the Jews ; and they have recognized that

patriotism is not simply a love of the *land* that people live in; though that, as we have learned from Scott, has much to do with it. True patriotism is a love of the people; of the nation—of the race. To rejoice in its victory, to sorrow at its defeat,—even as that great English statesman, William Pitt, is said to have died of grief after the battle of Austerlitz,—which was as much a defeat for England as for the allied Powers.

That our Lord—who came to save the world, who died for *all* men, who sent out his gospel to all nations, was a true lover of his own people is most evident. He was sent specially, he said, to *the lost sheep of the house of Israel*. (Matt. xv., 24.) He wept passionately over the impending fate of Jerusalem (Luke xiii., 34), though it was Jerusalem that was to reject and murder him. And while the Apostles were to go and preach to all nations, the directing word was, *beginning at Jerusalem*. (Luke ^xxiv., 47.)

So was the Apostle Paul a patriot. He loved his countrymen with such a passionate affection that, as he wrote to the Roman Christians, he could wish himself to be *accursed from Christ* for their *sake*. (Romans ix., 3.)

Thus did David and his band mourn and fast for the disasters of his nation. And for this, and for those who had fallen did he pour out his heart in one of the most touching elegaic odes of all time. There is no need to eulogize it; to point out its exquisite beauty; the church and the world alike have universally acknowledged that.

But it is worth noting from the point of view of these studies; the very heart of the warrior poet is poured out as he thinks of the nation's defeat and disgrace, the triumph of the enemy, the glory of past days,—the death of his friends, the sorrows of the daughters of Israel mourning the dead, who will never return. We may imagine him taking his harp, the very one, probably, with which he had comforted Saul in other days, and after sounding the deeper and minor notes of the instrument, and stirring up his soul as nothing can like music, breaking out in this passionate outburst :—

The beauty of Israel is slain upon thy high places ;
 HOW ARE THE MIGHTY FALLEN !

*Tell it not in Gath,
Publish it not in the streets of Askelon !
Lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice,
Lest the daughters of the uncircumcised triumph !*

*Ye Mountains of Gilboa,
Let there be no dew, neither rain upon you,—
Nor fields of offerings ;
For there the shield of the mighty is vilely cast away,
The shield of Saul, as not anointed with oil.*

*From the blood of the slain,
From the fat of the mighty,
The Bow of Jonathan turned not back,
And the sword of Saul returned not empty.*

*Saul and Jonathan were lovely and pleasant in their lives,
And in their death they were not divided.
They were swifter than eagles.
They were stronger than lions !*

*Ye daughters of Israel, weep over Saul,
Who clothed you in scarlet with delights,
Who put on ornaments of gold upon your apparel.*

How are the Mighty fallen in the midst of the battle !

*O Jonathan ! slain on thine own high places,
I am distressed for thee my brother Jonathan,
Very pleasant hast thou been unto me,
Thy love to me was wonderful,
Passing the love of women !*

Thus does "the eye of the poet, with a fine frenzy rolling," range rapidly, with heart-breaking intensity of consecrated feeling over the features of the position, and, finally, return to the strain with which he began :—

*How are the Mighty fallen,
And the weapons of war perished !*

But, now, passing by the poetical beauty of this ode, let us look at its matter as reflecting the mind and character of David himself.

It has long been a maxim to speak of the dead nothing but good. The maxim may be abused, but it embodies a sound feeling which is most conspicuous in this ode. When he speaks of the King and his sons as *the Beauty of Israel* slain on the high places; of the *Mighty* as having fallen;—when he celebrates the valor and prowess of both Saul and Jonathan in the day of battle; still more when he speaks of these two as *lovely and pleasant in their lives and in death not divided*, we may clearly see the operation of the idea of looking only at the brighter aspects of the character of those who have passed away.

But there is more than this : Apart from the strong, and even passionate affection that David bore to Jonathan, there is evidence of an abiding spirit of generous forgiveness to Jonathan's father. In the presence of such a tragic death, all past wrongs and injuries are forgotten. David had shown a wonderful spirit of forbearance during Saul's life; he now seals the same in his death, and he continues to show kindness to the house of Saul in future years. How beautiful is his message to the men of Jabesh-Gilead, who had shown such touching remembrance of Saul's kindness to them. It is in this spirit that he speaks of Saul and Jonathan as *lovely and pleasant in their lives*. Certainly the life of Jonathan was the life of an almost perfect man. And there was a time in the life of Saul, when his character was without spot or stain. And, even after a dark spirit of jealousy had taken possession of Saul towards David, it is very possible that (with one exception) there may have been between the father and the son, an unbroken affection, such as to justify their joint lives being spoken of as lovely and pleasant. For it is evident that these expressions refer not so much to what they were to the outside world as to one another.*

*It is noticeable that the incident above referred to, of David's composing a psalm for this occasion, most of the verses of which are also to be found in certain Psalms, has been seized upon by higher critics to prove the untrustworthiness of the narrative in the book of Chronicles. But nothing but a fixed desire to find points

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Come in at
Page 401
not here*

We may linger over this beautiful elegy yet a moment more, to notice the passionate tenderness with which David speaks of Jonathan's affection for him. "*Thy love to me,*" he cries, *was wonderful—passing the love of women !*

We know that Love was the very central requirement, and special development of the New Dispensation;—the one thing, the sure test; that without which, zeal, and labors, and sacrifices were *nothing*. (I. Cor. xiii.) Love was the new commandment of our great Master and Lord, that is, as is evident, a special love to fellow disciples as such,—and that by which they should be known to the world :—*Love to the brethren* ; this is the sign of a man having passed from death unto life. (I. John iii., 14). And the Christian unity, of which so much is said and thought in these days, is, in reality, according to our blessed Lord's own prayer (John xvii,) a unity of love, a oneness of affection, a cleaving together of those who are united as Jonathan was to David; for Jonathan *loved him as his own soul*. (I. Sam. xviii). Nay, it ascends higher than this, for the love between Christian brethren is to be like that ineffable affection that subsists eternally between the Father and the Son. (John xvii., 23.)

A unity in Christ's outward flock which is not such as this, is a mere travesty and caricature.

But, now, in this most vital matter, it is apparent that the roots of what was so wonderfully developed hereafter are

of proof for a predetermined theory would ever have led to the promulgation of such an idea. For nothing is in itself more natural than that the metrical composition which was first used on the occasion of the dedication of the ark (and the narrative states that this was the *first* time, implying subsequent changes,) should be afterwards incorporated into the book of Psalms itself. The fact that in the book of Psalms it is divided into two portions by no means militates against this view. It is evident that the composition, certainly inspired, was incorporated into the book exactly as those of Montgomery became part of the collections of hymns diffused throughout the Christian world, or as some poems of Keble's Christian year were so incorporated, or rather certain portions of them, and noticeably the famous hymn, *Sun of my Soul, Thou Saviour Dear*.

It is, however, a most lamentable circumstance that in the last charge of an Evangelical English Bishop (Perowne of Worcester) the opinion of the unbelieving critics is adopted as true, while the view which is at once in conformity with common sense, and the conclusions of the church for centuries should be rejected.

early apparent in the Old Testament dispensation. When, under Divine direction, the great Lawgiver sums up the two tables of the law, and gives the very essence of the Ten Commandments, it is not in the word, *Fear*, or *Honor*, or *Obey*, but in the word *Love*: *Thou shalt love*, in the first place, the Lord thy God; and *love* next, thy neighbour. This is the cream, and heart, and essence of the old religion, and everything else is to be judged in connection with it. Offerings, sacrifices, gifts, observances, ritual—are a mere sham in the absence of heartfelt and loving devotion. Of this there is abundant evidence in the writings and declarations of the prophets. (Isaiah i., etc.)

But the supreme manifestation of this principle of love is to be seen in the writings of David, when moved as in his Psalms he was moved, by the Holy Ghost.—That great outburst of thanksgiving and triumph—Psalm XVIII,—which is David's beyond cavil, commences *I will love Thee, O Lord*. So does Psalm CXVI.,—*I love the Lord*, because he hath heard my voice. So, in other psalms: "Let them that love Thy name be joyful. O love the Lord, ye, his saints," and others, all which, being extended, as the property of love naturally is—passes on to *brethren* and *companions*, and to those who *walk to the house of God in company*, manifesting itself in kind offices of affection, visiting men when they were sick; forgiving them when they had done wrong, and long remembering kindnesses and good will of former days.

All this is quite consistent with many of those declarations and deprecations of wrath which are found in some of the Psalms, and at which there has been stumbling. For, when examined, these will be found to be, in great part, of a judicial character, that is—sentences or declarations, of Divine wrath—David speaking as God's minister of wrath, (Romans xiii., 4.) against men who have done wilful wrong. For it should always be remembered that David, as king, and the Lord's anointed, was the Chief Magistrate of the land; and that he was bound, as such to act, against transgressors, not in a spirit of private revenge, but in discharge of public duty, even as a Judge or Magistrate does in the present day. Some of his psalms express the thoughts of a Magistrate, and some of the head of the army, fighting against

rebels and those resisting lawful authority; and, naturally, have a severe aspect which is apt to be misconstrued. But that David, as a private person, and acting with regard to himself alone, was of a forbearing, forgiving spirit, quick in temper doubtless, yet never wilfully or deliberately doing wrong to any man, one terribly conspicuous occasion excepted, there is abundant evidence in his life.

Yet, now that he is about to assume the kingdom, he will enter upon scenes that will try his temper and disposition as it has never been tried before. For nothing can be more certain than this: that prosperity, honor, and elevation, are more severe tests of character than adversity. It was always true, though it was first so plainly stated by our Lord, that it is hard for the rich to enter the Kingdom of heaven.

CHAPTER II.

DAVID ENTERS UPON HIS KINGDOM.

(2. Samuel ii., iii., iv.)

Few kings have ascended the throne under more discouraging conditions than those which surrounded David when he became, by right of his Divine anointing, the chief captain of Israel. He was King over the whole land *de jure*,—of right; but it was many years before he became King over the whole land *de facto*.

The fortunes of Israel were at a low ebb, indeed, when he entered upon such a limited function as he had—for only in Judah was he recognized. The Philistines had penetrated to the very centre of the kingdom; (that was the position of Mount Gilboa); they had obtained a great victory, and the King and his sons were slain. They were as much in the position of conquerors as William the Norman was after Hastings or as the allied Powers were after Waterloo. Humanly speaking, there was but a step between this, and the entire break-up of the kingdom, and its being resolved again into a number of tribes, under the dominancy of Philistia, as supreme over all. This, certainly, was what might have been looked for; and what would probably have happened but for the Divine Covenant, and for the *man*, sought out, chosen, and anointed to fulfil all the Divine will. And, certainly, it gives us an exalted idea of David's genius (under God), both for war and government, to contrast the position of the Kingdom on his assumption of power, and its condition when he laid it down in old age. For, at his death, the Kingdom was one, the tribes were united, the country was prosperous and wealthy; enemies were subdued, the succession in David's house established; and preparation completed for the erection of the most beautiful temple in the world. These were all

the triumphs of faith in God;—faith, the mainspring of his life and actions, which can be said of him with perfect truth, in spite of one dreadful fall, and another terrible mistake. The story of that life we must now contemplate, as it is unfolded in this Second Book of Samuel.

The first act of David (and it is very characteristic of the man) after the death of Saul, was to enquire of the Lord what he should do. He does not ask for much; for he probably well knew that Abner, Saul's cousin, the captain of the host, would be disposed to dispute the succession; and he shrank from plunging the whole country into civil war. But the tribe of Judah was his own. There he was born, there he had lived nearly all his days, in the territory of Judah he had overthrown Goliath, it was the women of Judah that had celebrated his victory with songs,—it was in the wilds of Judah he had lived all the days of his enforced exile. He might then surely calculate that Judah would acknowledge him. And so it did.

But he would not move without asking Divine guidance. In one of the most beautiful of his Psalms, the 16th, with the title of the *Golden Psalm*, he ascribes praise to God for direction actually received. "*I will bless the Lord,*" he says, "*who hath given me counsel !*" And in another, the 72nd, called a psalm of Asaph, but in the margin a psalm for Asaph, which is doubtless the true title, for it is one of the most profound and philosophic of them all; David, emerging from a cloud of spiritual darkness, cries out to God: "*Thou shall guide me with Thy counsel ; and afterward receive me to glory !*"

All this directly corresponds to the various crises in his life where he is described as seeking counsel of the Lord.

The answer (doubtless obtained through the Ummim of the Priest, for the priest was with him all the while) was that he should go up to what was then the chief city of Judah,—that ancient city of *HEBRON*,—even then a place of famous memories.—For there was the principal place of Abraham's sojournings, and, close by, was the spot where Abraham and Isaac and Jacob were buried. And it is a famous place still, with its name unchanged, about twenty-

five miles south from Jerusalem. Judah, by ancient prophecy, was the Royal tribe, and Hebron, for some years, now becomes the Royal City. Here the men of Judah gather round him, and they anoint him King over his own tribe. Thus far and no farther did his reign extend during the seven succeeding years.

But what a small beginning !—One tribe only out of twelve !

Yet who hath despised the day of small things ? The man who does this is oft times demonstrated to be a fool.

David made no attempt for many years, to enlarge the borders of his Kingdom. And there is no sign of any royal state, of any display, any building of a suitable house, or even any setting up of the tabernacle, or fetching the ark from its resting place ; not even any organizing of a military force. Some of these may have developed during the sojourn at Hebron, but none are mentioned. (But it is the order of Scripture narrative to omit much.) Soon after arriving at Hebron, David had reported to him the action of the men of Jabesh Gilead in taking down and burying the body of Saul. And, again, the high and honorable character of the man shines out. For he takes the trouble to send some of his men all the way to Gilead to tell them how highly he appreciates what they have done, promising to remember it, and praying them to be valiant and strong for him, as the House of Judah have stood by him as king. What came of this we are not informed.

But now David has to deal with a very serious condition of things ; for Abner, Saul's cousin, (*a prince and a great man*, as David calls him) refuses to acknowledge David as king, and sets up Saul's son, Ish-bosheth (or Esh-baal, as he is elsewhere called) as king over all the rest of the tribes. He makes the centre of his kingdom, doubtless for military reasons,—Mahanaim, a city beyond Jordan, in the region of Gilead,—a place of famous memory ; for it was there that Jacob rested when returning from Haran, and where he had the vision of the angels camping around him, from whence the place got its name, which signifies "Two Camps."

Abner, in this, was not loyal to God's ordinance ; for he must have known that David had been anointed king by the prophet Samuel. He must, too, have known that David had been acknowledged as his successor by Saul himself in that famous interview in the wilds of Engedi (I. Sam. xxiv.)

But a spirit of perversity was upon him :—He rejected David, even as the priests in after ages rejected the son of David; who came to his own, but his own received him not. (John i.) In this, and in other particulars, David was a remarkable type of Him who should come after; who was of the seed of David according to the flesh, but declared to be the Son of God with power by the Holy Ghost. (Romans i.)

An evil day it was for Abner when he made defection, for it led to his destruction. Yet such was his influence, that all Israel, except Judah, followed him and acknowledged Saul's son as king. Ishbosheth seems to have been a man of no capacity—a mere figure head ;—Abner being, like a great Englishman of medieval times, the Earl of Warwick,—the real kingmaker—able to set up one or put down another.

Indeed, the course of events in these days in Israel was, in many respects, remarkably like that of medieval times in England : revolts, civil strife, sometimes open war, alternating with periods of peace, advancement and prosperity. But two things are most noticeable in this record of the fortunes of Israel. David and his House, never failed to have the loyal adhesion of the great tribe of JUDAH,—the sceptre once established in Judah, never departed from it, as was foretold by Jacob; (Gen. xlix), and next, that there was never an interruption in the succession of David's house even to the very end. For while, after the separation of the Ten Tribes in the time of Rehoboam, the succession to the throne of the revolted tribes was constantly interrupted, and never long continued in the same family; in the kingdom of Judah, the throne descended from father to son, and from father to son again, without a single break. The forecast of continuity may be carried even farther ; and it is strictly rational so to do, (for all Scripture is rational) for that there was a spiritual descent as well as a natural, a spiritual throne of David as well as a natural, a spiritual continuity in the Son and Lord

of David, of that which in the course of nature came to an end—no one can doubt who is acquainted with the word of God. It is a truth that shines out in the prophecies and psalms of the old dispensation and in the teachings of Christ and His Apostles in the New ; that the Messiah who came was to sit upon the throne of *David* ; (not the natural, for His Kingdom was not of this world) *to order it and to establish it with judgment and justice for ever.* (Isaiah ix.,) and to this agrees the doctrine of the Epistle to the Hebrews, (Chap. xii.,) that there had been a *removing of things that could be shaken, viz., the natural Kingdom, that the Kingdom which could not be shaken might remain.*

Even so, and we, in this late age of the world are witnesses to the truth of it.

But to return to the events of the time of David.

During the years that David was king in Hebron, there was long and desultory war between the house of Saul and his own ; the country distracted by this civil war with its accompanying miseries ; not David's fault, but his grief and sorrow. He certainly felt that all of Israel were his brethren. For when Abner was treacherously slain by Joab, David lamented over him as he would for one of his own captains, and protested : "*I and my Kingdom are guiltless!*" (Chap. iii., 28.)

David however, like other kings, was often sorely troubled by the course followed by his chief officers, and, of these, Joab was the most troublesome. A valiant and able captain for David, as Abner was for Saul, and related to David as Abner was to Saul. But being a relative, he took liberties, as relatives are apt to do, and being a strong and self-willed man, he was hard to control.

It is a true touch of nature when David, after the death of Abner, says to his servants : "*These men* (that is Joab and Abishai), *the sons of Zeruiah* (his sister) *be too hard for me.*"

Joab was the captain of the host all the days of David, and we shall find him most conspicuous in all the events of his reign ; a man of war, brave to a fault, at times utterly careless of shedding blood, and coming at last to a violent end, of which more later on.

Very little is recorded of this long war between the houses of David and Saul. But one of the incidents, at its close, is striking, and told in detail. Abner moved his force to the very border of David's kingdom, viz., Gibeon. Joab perforce goes out to meet him. The two generals propose an ordeal of battle, by twelve on each side, which, being agreed to, the combatants fiercely join issue, armed with swords; each catching his opponent's head and fighting so desperately that, apparently, every one of them is slain. Chap. ii., 15, 16.) This decided nothing. But the thirst for blood was awakened, the two armies join in battle—the contest is fierce, and Abner is beaten. During his retreat with the broken host, a younger brother of Joab—Asahel,—(*light of foot as a wild roe*, he is said to be), pursues with the rest, but seeks only Abner and overtakes him.

Abner's character shines out well in the rencontre that ensues, and we can only feel a sorrow that such a man was not on the side of David. For he was of far nobler calibre than Joab.

Seeing Asahel determined to come to combat, (rash and foolish young man as he was, far inferior in size and strength to Abner), the great general turns, and with a touch of contempt bids him assault one of the young men. "*Turn from following me,*" he says, "*wherefore should I smite thee to the ground,*" and then adds—what shows the nobility of the man: "*How then should I hold up my face to Joab, thy brother?*" (v. 20, 22). They were all brethren, as Abner felt; and this is noticeable, for they were of different tribes. But all true Israelites felt, like David,—and like Abner,—that they were one people.

But the rash young fool rushed on, (*Quem deus vult perderit prius dementat*),—he rushed to his own destruction, for Abner now had no alternative but to slay him.

Unlike David with Goliath, this rash young fellow was pursuing Abner in vain-glorious confidence. And he met the end that might have been expected.

But his death caused a sort of panic amongst some of the pursuing host. When they came to the place where Asahel lay dead *they stood still* and pursued no further. The lion was at bay, and it was dangerous to molest him.

This, doubtless, was the reason why when Abner, arresting his host, proposed an armistice. This was readily listened to by Joab and Abishai. "SHALL THE SWORD DEVOUR FOR EVER ? cries Abner ; *knowest thou not that it will be bitterness in the latter end ?* Pregnant word, indeed ! Never were truer spoken. The very words that the powers of Europe have been saying to one another in these closing months of the century, the very words, in effect, which the Czar of Russia made the foundation of his touching appeal for a conference. "*Shall the sword devour for ever ?*" he said, practically, to his brother potentates of Germany and France : "*Know you not that it will be bitterness in the latter end ?*" Most true. We do know it, they might all have replied, we know it by bitter experience of burned cities and devastated provinces. Austria has not forgotten Sadowa ; Prussia cannot forget the humiliation of Jena, though so long ago. France has a bitter remembrance of Sedan and the capture of Paris ; England has not forgotten how the blood of her bravest and best was poured out in the Crimea ; and Russia herself has not forgotten Sebastopol.

It has, indeed, been *bitterness in the latter end*. For all the dreadful pouring out of blood in the Napoleonic wars,—what remained but *bitterness in the end*. The map of Europe remained practically as before. So remarkably do these Scripture sayings fit the events of these times.

Joab was very willing to listen to a proposal for peace. The words of Abner indicate that this conflict took place at the close of the seven years' strife. Shall the sword devour for ever ? clearly indicates that it had devoured for a long period.

Shortly after this, Abner had a quarrel with the puppet King Ishbosheth ; an ignoble quarrel, indeed, but, like other ignoble events, overruled to a noble end ; viz., the unification of the whole kingdom. Abner's words in proposing a league clearly indicate what was, no doubt, true,—that he was the real master of events. He offered to bring over the whole revolted territory ; an offer that David was willing to accept, making only one condition, viz., that Michal, his

his former wife,—whom Saul had wrongfully taken away should be restored to him.

This was a politic and far-seeing condition, for it would be a sign to the whole country that there was peace between the house of Saul and David. But, though she formerly loved David, her affection, now, had evidently passed away. But she *was* restored ; and Abner, assembling the elders of Israel, made known to them what he had done. And they were, evidently, well pleased to hear it, for the land would now be at peace.

But now comes before us another dark deed of treachery and blood. Joab, the chief of David's army, sees in this peace and cession of territory a danger to himself. Abner cannot fail, after this, to have a high place in the kingdom. Jealousy whispers,—or, shall we not say, the *Devil* whispers in his ear, "Abner will have a higher place than thyself." Abner in the highest place ! That is not to be borne. And the next whisper is : "Abner must be slain."

This devilish temptation is yielded to, and the manner in which it is carried out reminds us forcibly of the doings of the Duke of Gloucester in his dealings with the unfortunate Hastings and his brother the Duke of Clarence. For Joab comes to the King, and upbraids him forcibly for making peace. "*What hast thou done ?*" he cries. And one would judge that he was like Richard III. in simulating passion : "*Thou knowest Abner, the son of Ner, that he came to deceive thee.*" Came, Joab insinuates,—simply as a spy—"to know thy going out and thy coming in, and to know all that thou doest." (v. 24, 25.) Then, having thus laid a foundation for some justification of the bloody deed he contemplates, he sends messengers after Abner, who, on arriving, is asked by Joab to a private conference. At this conference, having gone, probably unarmed, unsuspecting of danger, Abner is treacherously murdered by Joab,—*stabbed under the fifth rib*,—as the phrase is given ; Joab making pretence that in doing this, he was revenging the death of his brother Asahel. An empty pretence, for Asahel was slain in war, while fully armed, and after fair warning from the great warrior whom he rashly pursued.

David's anger on hearing of this treacherous deed was very bitter ; and reading of his strong imprecation of providential wrath on Joab's house by reason of it, we feel inclined to ask ; as a prophet of God was once asked : "*Doest thou well to be angry—so angry as to call down vengeance on the head of the perpetrator ?*"

Why not punish him thyself, David ? Art thou not King ?

It is evident that he *could not*. Kings, in modern times, have been impotent in presence of powerful prime ministers, —or generals,—or even of ecclesiastics, as Henry II. was with Beckett. "*I am weak, though I am the anointed King,*" David cries, "*these sons of Zeruiah be too hard for me!*" But he goes on—in the true spirit of a man who had faith in Divine retribution,—"*The Lord shall reward the doer of evil according to his wickedness.*" (v. 39.)

But David gave Abner most honorable burial in Hebron, commanded a general fast (in which command he specially included Joab). followed the bier himself, lifted up his voice and wept, lamenting over him with pathetic words, which almost recall his outburst on the death of Saul himself :

*Died Abner as a fool dieth ?
Thy hands were not bound ;—
Nor thy feet put into fetters ;
man falleth before wicked men,
lest thou !*

The whole day of the funeral was spent in mourning and lamentation ; and, at its close, the King said to his servants : "*Know ye not that there is a prince and a great man fallen this day in Israel !*"

The tide now being turned, two of the captains of Ishbosheth thought to curry favor with the King by assassinating him ; the deception and the deed again reminding us of the days of the Edwards and the Henrys in English history. And they carried out their purpose with as much treachery as Joab had shown in the murder of Abner.

They brought the head of the murdered Ishbosheth to David, expecting a reward. But, again, the nobility of

David's character shines out. Nothing could be of more importance to him than to have this son of Saul out of the way. But to have him murdered was abhorrent to every instinct of his renewed nature. Having twice spared the life of the father, he is not now to reward the murderers of the son. He ordered them, therefore, to execution, but the head of Ishbosheth he buried in Abner's tomb.

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CHAPTER III.

DAVID AS KING OVER ALL ISRAEL.

(2. Samuel v.)

The death of the only son of Saul who could possibly have been thought of as having any right to succeed him, together with the act of Abner in making peace with David, removed all obstacles in the way of his being recognized as King over the whole land. So, now, we read that *all the tribes came to Hebron* to tender their allegiance. But the terms in which they did it were very striking. Speaking by their representatives, they begin by saying: "*Behold, we are thy bone and thy flesh!*" And, in this, they strike a true and most pertinent note. For, more than any nation or people in the world, abiding under one government, they constituted one family, related throughout to one another by blood.

They all sprang from JACOB, who was the true head of the house of Israel, and of no other house. The Jews, indeed, had ABRAHAM to their father. But so had all the tribes that sprang from Ishmael. All the Arabian nations of the present day, and many of the Moors of Africa, look up to Abraham as their father, and are proud of the descent.

The Jews, moreover, had ISAAC as a progenitor; but this they shared in common with the Edomites, the head of whose house was ESAU. But JACOB alone was the head of the house of Israel, which house sprang solely from his twelve sons. One common blood, then, ran in the veins of all the tribes, and they constituted, from generation to generation, no matter how numerous they might become, but one family;—they were all "*one bone and one flesh.*" To appreciate the force of this, we may contrast it with any of the nations of modern Europe, not to speak of Asia or of the American Continent. What a mixture of races constitutes

modern England, or even Scotland or Ireland ; with one language, what diversity of race and blood ! That the same thing may be said of France, Spain, Italy, Germany, Scandinavia, Austria, Russia,—is universally known. But this Jewish people, at the time of David's accession, were of one blood. And the desire and intention to preserve them so, for wise and far-reaching purposes in Providence and grace, was one of the reasons why marriage with the people of surrounding nations was so strictly forbidden. The main reason, indeed, was that they might preserve the true religion, and not fall into idolatry. But the fulfilling of the great purpose of their being a *separate* nationality was never lost sight of. And it is one of the marvels of history in the Christian era how this people have continued, with all their wanderings, to be one blood and one flesh still.

The elders went on to recall the fact that in King Saul's time David had been the leader of the people in war,—*leading them out, and bringing them in*, according to the expressive phrase used by Moses with regard to Joshua, when designating him as his successor (Numbers xxvii.) But they used also, another phrase which strikingly connects David with the Messiah that was to descend from him. (These incidental phrases and terms are very worthy of note as showing, more than direct statements, the *continuity of purpose and idea* that runs through the whole of revelation.) These elders said that the Divine will had been also expressed to David in the words : "*Thou shalt feed my people Israel*," (v. 2), and also, "*Thou shalt be a captain over Israel*." The first of these corresponds exactly with the words used by the priests to Herod, when summoned to tell where the Messiah should be born. They quoted the prophet Micah as predicting that a governor should be born in Bethlehem, who should rule,—or, as it is in the margin,—should *feed* my people, Israel. (Micah v. ii.) *Feed* is plainly the sense of the original.

And, with regard to David's being a Captain and a Leader, these, again, are the very ideas of that striking prophecy of Isaiah, in which the coming Messiah (for the words plainly refer to the times of the Gospel), is prefigured as

another *David*, who should be a *Leader and Commander* to the people. (Isaiah lv.) Christ, we must remember, was always looked forward to as the Son of David, as we see in the Gospels.)

This figure of a ruler and king as being a shepherd¹, is in contradistinction to the perpetual tendency of kings in these ancient times (and, in some modern times, too), to become mere arbitrary rulers, if not tyrants, of which history furnishes only too many examples. Such as these live for themselves; they seek their own honor and glory; the idea of their caring for and watching over the people is far from them. Nebuchadnezzar, walking on his Babylonian palace and saying: "*Is this not great Babylon that I have built for the honor of My Majesty!*" (Daniel iv.,) is an example of one in olden times; and Louis XIV., proudly protesting "*L'Etat, c'est moi*," and strutting, in his pride, about the great palace of Versailles, of another in modern days. But the Divine idea of a King, is that expressed to David. Thou shalt *feed* my people: and let us note that this word was spoken a thousand years before the Christian era, so true is it, that the root and ground of all true ideas of government, as well as of religion, are to be found in these ancient chronicles.

But we, who hold that a Divine prescience was ever working in them cannot wonder at this. It is most natural, and conformable to the circumstances and the reason of things.

It is, indeed, exactly what has been so well expressed in the well known lines of Tennyson:—

"Through all the ages, one unceasing purpose runs."

It is with David that the real line of the Jewish monarchy begins, and it was, under God, by his genius for "ordering on good foundations," both state and church, that the monarchy continued through so many generations in an unchanged line. He was the first of the great kings of his race; men who were distinguished either for their wisdom, or their care for the people, or their zeal for education, or for the establishment of a good judicial system; or their care of the Temple and its services. He it was that placed the monarchy on a proper constitutional basis, guarded and limited by the

Divine laws, given through the hand of Moses; he it was who gave the nation a central capital, and a central place for the worship of God.* In all this, let us bear in mind,—he was under the direction of a higher wisdom than his own. *The Lord was with him,—the Lord commanded him, the Lord gave him counsel*; this we constantly read. David, therefore, never took glory to himself, nor was glory ascribed to him by those who came after him. And this is largely true of his successors also.

At thirty-seven years of age then, we find this remarkable man established on the throne with the hearty consent of all the tribes. It is noticeable that the league into which David entered with the elders of the tribes, when all were gathered in Hebron, was “BEFORE THE LORD.” The throne was established on this great idea of acknowledging the supreme sovereignty of God. The HIGH PRIEST was with David in Hebron. He had continued with David ever since he had fled to him for shelter. David, then, was again “anointed,”—which, at once, suggests a religious ceremony with an officiating priest and, doubtless, though the fact is not expressly mentioned, that direction of the Law would be complied with which ordered that the King should have by him (transcribed with his own hand), a copy of those parts of the law which related to his own duty. Deut. xvii.)

DAVID TAKES JERUSALEM.

The first act of David, on being anointed king, was to

*It was never to be forgotten that Jehovah was the real King of Israel. THE LORD REIGNETH. Thy throne is established of old. THE LORD REIGNETH, let the earth rejoice. THE LORD REIGNETH, let the people tremble. Thus does David himself sing. (Psalm xciii, etc.) Neither the king nor the elders nor the priests have power to make laws. And they never do. There is but one Law: the law given for all time through Moses. And this plainly is the reason why so much of that law was for a time not then present. It anticipated the future, for it was to be the Statute Book of the nation so long as the nation lasted. Not until the Supreme Law-giver came himself upon earth, was the law superseded. And then it was not destroyed, but most carefully preserved in the Old Testament canon. But it was *fulfilled*, viz., in having a higher and more spiritual,—indeed a universal application, superinduced upon it so as to be capable of being not for one people and country only, but for all people and for all time.

secure possession of Jerusalem ; obviously for the purpose of making it the national capital.

Hitherto, strange as it may appear, there had been no centre for the whole nation, though there were important places in the different tribes. Thus, there were the cities of Refuge, all of which were cities of Levites, chief of which was that very city of Hebron, where David had so long reigned ; Shechem also, in Ephraim, and Ramoth Gilead, across Jordan ; round all of which important events gathered as time ran on. But there was no central capital for the whole. The country was, for many generations, exactly as the United States would be without Washington.

But David had the instinct of government as well as, other great gifts. And that instinct told him that as there was a monarchy there must be a capital.

But there at once arises the question, what shall be the seat of the monarchy ? Where shall the capital be fixed ?

This is not an easy question to decide, as the experience of countries and states proves. Generally, when events are left to settle themselves, the chief centre of business and concourse becomes the capital city. So it has been all over Europe, as, for example : London, Paris, Berlin, Vienna. But, in the United States, locality has been the determining factor. Events, however, have proved this to be a mistaken principle, for there can hardly be a question that New York ought to be the capital of the United States, Philadelphia of Pennsylvania, Chicago of Illinois, Detroit of Michigan, and New Orleans of Louisiana. In some cases, the natural rule has prevailed, and with the best results ;—thus Boston is the capital of Massachusetts, Hartford of Connecticut, and Richmond of Virginia. And, after all, if convenience of access is adopted as a criterion, the place of greatest concourse will always have the easiest and most rapid modes of access. The old proverb that "All roads lead to Rome," is just as true in spirit to-day as it ever was. But in the land of Canaan, and amongst the tribes, although Israel had occupied the land for hundreds of years, no place of general concourse had established itself. The choice, therefore, was open.

The rocky heights where Jerusalem now stands, were,

from the very first settlement of the land, an object of envy and contention for military reasons. The place was a seat of monarchy even in the time of Abraham, for the Salem of Melchizidek was, undoubtedly, the Jerusalem of after days. It was, beyond doubt, the strongest place in the country, most likely stronger in David's time than it is now, for the great Tyropean valley that intersects it was much deeper then, than at present, and the highest part of the city, the hill of Zion, much more difficult of access. Be this as it may, we find, from the first, that Jerusalem was an object of contention. The ground it stands on was partly in Benjamin and partly in Judah; and both tribes had formerly attempted to take it and failed. (Josh xv., 63; Judges i., 21.) This ground falls away from rocky heights into deep and rugged ravines on three sides, and it has presented, again and again, most formidable obstacles, even to such forces as Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, could bring against it; or even to the army of the Romans, under Titus. In natural strength, it resembles our own Quebec, though it is not like Quebec, bordered by a great river.

Its inhabitants, the Jebusites, were warlike in defence of their stronghold, (which at that time comprised only the western hill of the present city) but were, apparently, not disposed to be aggressive if left alone. They had continued there in undisturbed possession all through the régime of the Judges and the reign of Saul, though we may wonder that he did not attempt to take this, the strongest place in his own tribe, especially as his son Jonathan had proved himself capable of a similar exploit in the capture of Michmash. But whatever was the reason, there the place remained; a strong fort in the very midst of the land in the possession of the remains of one of the tribes commanded to be driven out, viz., the Jebusites.

When David made a movement against the stronghold, the inhabitants looked down from their rocky height and ridiculed the attempt: "*The blind and the lame amongst us,*" they said, "*can keep you out of this city. You cannot come up hither.*" But David, true general that he was, saw a hollow way (called a gutter in the narrative; the Tyropean Valley was formerly just such a place), by which the walls

could be approached (even as Wolfe discerned the spot where the heights of Abraham could be scaled), and he offered a high reward to the man who could climb up first and smite the Jebusites. We learn from the First Book of Chronicles (where the story of David's life runs parallel with that in the Second Book of Samuel), that JOAB was the man who performed this feat. (1 Chron. xi., 6.)

This is what we might expect, from what we know of the man. He was chief captain already, so it was not the hope of reward that stimulated him; though, very probably, it might be the fear of losing the high post he had. At any rate, to Joab belongs the honor of having first entered the city; which, being taken, became the capital of the land, the seat of government, and the centre of worship. It says much for David's insight and prescience that Jerusalem has continued to be the capital ever since. In spite of all the invasions and sieges, and desolations to which it has been subject there has never been any change in this respect, either in ancient times or modern. It has been razed to the ground more than once; yet it has always been built up again, and stands to-day with one of its chief towers called by the name of David, and the great mosque of these *times of the treading down by the Gentiles*, standing, beyond doubt, on the very ground purchased by David, three thousand years ago, for the site of his projected Temple.

Once in possession of the stronghold, David established his own dwelling there. And here we first find a notice of that King of Tyre, Hiram, by name, of whom there is so much mention later on in connection with the building of the Temple, a good man and serviceable, one of those men amongst the heathen to whom the Sacred Record does full justice, as has been before noticed in these studies with respect to other men not of the Hebrew race.

David also strengthened the fortifications of the city, building *round about from Millo*,—(which was a strong position, to which much attention was devoted afterwards), *inward*—that is to the other extremity, thus making one continuous line of fortification. The superstructures of these works, in some places, probably remain to this day; for we

must remember that the art of masonry was as well developed then as now, as the magnificent lower courses of masonry in the outer wall of Solomon's great enclosure round the Temple still stand to testify. So, then, *David went on, and grew great, and the Lord of Hosts*, (a phrase which may, in some connections, be translated "God of Battles"), *was with him*, that is in all outward things. (Chap. v. 10.)

But in things spiritual, prosperity and power brought about their usual temptations. And against these David was by no means proof.

DAVID'S MULTIPLYING OF WIVES.

For we now read that he took more concubines and wives out of Jerusalem.

In this, he transgressed the commandments of God, as given in the Law,—in two particulars. For, if these concubines and wives were out of Jerusalem as it then was, they must have been of the Jebusite race, of the Canaanitish nations, marriage with whom was utterly forbidden. But, further, this taking of more wives was a falling into the ways of the heathen conquerors of the times; another thing that was utterly forbidden.

The far-reaching prescience of the law, as given through Moses, anticipated this danger; and we find, amongst the directions given as to the conduct of future kings, this express warning: *He shall not multiply wives to himself.* This, in conjunction with the prohibition against multiplying horses—and greatly multiplying to himself *silver and gold*, (Deut. xviii.), clearly points to his keeping from following the common examples of luxury and pomp of heathen potentates around him.

Now, the Mosaic law, while allowing more than one wife, plainly contemplates, in all the various directions given, that *only one other wife shall be allowed*,—and the practice of taking another, while allowed, is surrounded with regulations, making it difficult, and is evidently intended to place obstacles in the way. (Exod. xvi., 10, etc.) But the *multiplying* of wives is expressly forbidden,—even to a King—to whom, in Oriental countries, a large harem is an affair of pomp and state, much as an extensive palace is.

When, then, David took Abigail to wife, in addition to Ahinoam, the Jezreelitess, he was within the limits of the Mosaic law. And, even when he required Michal, his former wife, to be restored to him, it was almost certainly a stipulation of state policy, and not that she should live with him as an ordinary wife. So far, then, his conduct might possibly be without reproach.

But, now, in taking wives and concubines from the captives of the conquered city, he was clearly transgressing, with regard to both. As to the wives, he had no right to take them at all, and as to the concubines, what he did was also clearly forbidden. In the Book of Deuteronomy (chap. xxi.) there is an express reference to a conquered city and to the treatment of female captives, who are expressly debarred from being made concubines. If a captor desires to keep a captive woman, he must make her his wife.

Thus, most lamentably does David begin to transgress in this matter, and lay the foundation of troubles that darkened all his later days, as we shall see later on.

*NOTE TO CHAPTER III.

A KING AS SHEPHERD.

It is very interesting to note the way in which that great and good prince, Cyrus, is spoken of by ancient chroniclers. Thus one says: *But what was still greater in him was his steadfast persuasion that all his labors should tend to the happiness of his people; and that it was not by pompous equipage, luxurious living, or a magnificent table, that a king ought to distinguish himself from his subjects, but by a superiority of merit of every kind. He said himself one day, that a prince ought to consider himself as a shepherd, and that he ought to have the same vigilance, care and goodness. It is his duty, says he, to watch that his people may live in quiet; to burden himself with anxieties and cares that his people may be exempt from them . . . to place his delight in seeing them increase and multiply, and valiantly expose his own person for their protection, because it is for that very end that he is their king as much as it is the end and office of a shepherd to take care of his flock.*

The above is quoted by Rollin from one of the ancient chroniclers and is doubtless reasonably near the truth, as it comports with all that has been said of Cyrus by any that have written of him.

The part that he played in fulfilling the Divine purpose in regard to the return of the Jews from the Babylonish exile is well known to readers of the Old Testament, as well as the references to him of the Prophet Isaiah. That prophet writes: (Chap. xlv.)

The Lord that saith of Cyrus,—he is my shepherd and shall perform all my pleasure. The objection of misbelieving critics that this naming of Cyrus cannot have been by a prophet who lived so long before he was born, is simply founded on the opinion, (for it is nothing but an opinion,) that there never was, and never can be, any foretelling of future events. When critics take up ground like this they place themselves in the category of men who deny that Scripture is the word of God and affirm that it is, in great part, a literary fraud.

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CHAPTER IV.

DAVID'S WAR WITH THE PHILISTINES. — HIS BRING- ING THE ARK TO JERUSALEM.

(2 Samuel, v. vi.)

After taking and fortifying his capital, David's attention is next called to those old enemies, the Philistines.

The silence of the chronicle respecting them after their victory in Mount Gilboa, is very remarkable. But they certainly did not follow up the victory ; for when we next hear of them they are back in their own country.

During the seven years of David's partial reign in Hebron, they seem to have remained quiet ; but now that he is King over the whole land, we read that *all the Philistines came up to seek David*.

Possibly this was without hostile intent ; possibly it was an invasion. All we learn is that David "*went down to the 'hold' "*" ;—doubtless the old stronghold of Adullam, close to the Philistine border. If he intended to confer peaceably with them, nothing came of it, for they now "*spread themselves*" in military array *over the valley of Rephaim* : a wide valley, lying between Jerusalem and Bethlehem, and where they were within striking distance of the capital of David's Kingdom.*

At this demonstration, he again *enquires of the Lord*, receives answer that the Lord *would deliver the Philistines into*

*The Valley of Rephaim.—The configuration of this valley affords a striking proof of the accuracy of the narrative. It is totally unlike the narrow valleys which lie between Jerusalem and the Mediterranean Plain, in that it is a wide-spreading piece of ground several miles in extent. And nothing would be more natural than for an invading force, having pushed their way up the narrow valleys and ravines through which the railway now runs to *spread themselves* out on reaching this wide valley of Rephaim, which would command both Jerusalem and Bethlehem.

his hand ; attacks and defeats them on their own border, from whence they retreated so rapidly that they left the images of their gods behind them. (v. 21.) David's men *burned* these images, doubtless by his command ; and for two good reasons : first, to inspire his soldiers with courage to stand against the formidable enemies, whose very gods were now prisoners in their hands ; and, secondly (and of more importance), to demonstrate the security of those who trust in the LORD OF HOSTS, the GOD OF THE ARMIES OF ISRAEL, whose help David invoked so conspicuously in his conflict with Goliath.

David could tell his men that those who trusted in the Lord would *never be confounded*: as witness the victory under Samuel, (1 Sam. vii.,) as well as his own with the giant ; and that the sole reason why Saul was defeated by the Philistines more than once, and especially at Gilboa, was that the "*Lord had departed from him*" because of disobedience.

This defeat of the Philistines, however, was not decisive. They were able to rally their army and again invade Judah ; spreading themselves out in the same valley, as before. The story of what now took place is curious and interesting, exhibiting what is so often noticeable in the Divine narrative, the working of Divine power through human wisdom and intelligence to a successful issue.

For David again *enquires of the Lord*, and the answer given is that he must not make a front attack, but use stratagem, *fetching a compass*, and getting in rear, where there were mulberry trees that would conceal his movements. The country round about is hilly and rugged, abounding in rocks and ravines, and eminently suited to an operation of this kind. David knew every corner of it, for it was near the famous stronghold of Adullam, where he had staid so long with his band.

This movement, obviously, from a military point of view, was the best disposition of his force. The direction given that he is to wait until he hears *the sound of a going in the tops of the mulberry trees* (v. 23), seems, at first sight, a very singular one. But consideration will show that what he is to wait for is a storm ; a shaking, a coming on of heavy rain, or mist, probably of thunder, like that which had helped them

under Samuel (1 Sam. vii). Such a condition would be eminently favorable to an attack by one who was well prepared; while it would tend to disorganize and throw off their guard those who were not. Sentries would be called in to attend to tents, to prevent their being blown away, and the whole camp would be intent on making ready for the impending storm. This, undoubtedly, is what was intended; and it had the desired effect, for David was able to burst upon the Philistine host unawares, and *smite them*, driving them before him to one of the strong places in their own land.

Some time after this, David seems (chap. viii., etc.) to have taken the offensive against the Philistine powers, and, after various alternations of war and peace, to have brought them into complete subjection. For nothing is heard of them for some hundred and fifty years after the death of David.

And now transpires one of the most important events in the chequered career of this monarch, and one that had very far-reaching consequences. This was the bringing of the famous ARK OF GOD to a permanent resting place, which resting place was, naturally, the capital city of Jerusalem; a resting place from which it was never afterwards removed. The fixing of this resting place of the ark in Jerusalem led to the building there of the permanent Temple; a proceeding which had innumerable important consequences in after years, some of which are in full operation at this very day.

What the Ark *was*, what it *contained*, what were the *ideas bound up in it*, all these points have been fully discussed before; suffice it now to say that this ark was the very centre and heart of the religion given through Moses. More than the altars, more than the table of shewbread, more than the seven-branched lampstand, was this Ark. For it was the only place where, upon its golden-plated mercy-seat, and between its carved cherubim, the Divine glory was ever manifested in visible form. The form, let it be remembered, was simply that of a cloud. For no *shape* was ever visible, or ever has been made visible, at all analogous to the representation by images of the gods of the heathen. *Ye saw no similitude*, emphatically observes Moses (Deut. iv., 12), when referring to the voice sounding on Mount Sinai.

The ark was utterly unlike anything known in the temples of the heathen. These had altars, as we know very well, for many of them still subsist in collections of antiquities in Rome and elsewhere. But this sacred chest and its contents were unique.

Now, since its capture by the Philistines in the time of Eli, the priest, and its restoration to them through fright, it had never been, apparently, in its proper place in the Tabernacle. It had remained in the little town of Kirjath-Jearim, in the hill country of western Judea, in the house of a priest. And it proves how little concern, even in his best days, Saul had for the ordinances of worship that he had suffered it to remain there during his whole reign. But, now, one was in power who was, in having a high respect for religious ordinances, *a man after God's own heart*. Let it ever be borne in mind that that striking phrase was used with regard to this matter alone.

David, then, being at peace, and having the whole nation with him as loyal subjects, determines to summon a great assembly of the chosen men of Israel, for the purpose of fetching the ark from Kirjath Jearim to Jerusalem. It was undoubtedly with regard to this occasion that he composed, to be sung for the first time, that striking Psalm cxxxi., commencing :

Lord, remember David and all his afflictions,
and going on:—

*Arise, O Lord, into Thy rest !
Thou and the Ark of Thy strength !*

But the great Hymn of this occasion was the magnificent ode (Psalm lxviii) commencing :—

*Let God arise,—Let his enemies be scattered,
Let them that hate Him flee before Him.*

in which, rising to the loftiest notes of sublime poetry, the Psalmist ranges over every topic that concerns the ways, the attributes, the powers, the majesty, the doings of Almighty God, and stirs up himself and the great host to praise Him, who had done such wondrous things for his people.

Yet, singular to say, while the imagination of the King was thus exercised, both he and the priests utterly forgot the strict injunctions of the Mosaic law with regard to the manner in which the ark should be handled, when necessary to be moved. For, in the law, there were strict injunctions that when the Tabernacle was taken down the Priests alone were to take order respecting the Ark, covering it with the sacred cloths and putting the staves in their places (for the Ark itself was never to be touched); rings and staves being provided that it might be carried without being handled. And the penalty of touching the Ark was death; — a terrible penalty, indeed; but, after all, it was perfectly easy to avoid it.

All this ought to have had been well known to the priest who was with David, and to David himself, as well as to any Levites who were in the assembly. Yet, it was entirely forgotten by them all; from which some would be inclined to doubt the accuracy of the chronicle, as the manner of modern critics is. But is it so that important matters are never forgotten now? Are mistakes never made in the conduct of important ceremonial processions in these times? Are all precautions taken, that ought to be taken, in the marching of armies, or the conduct of great state ceremonies? It is not many years since, in the Coronation ceremonies of the Czar of Russia there was such a want of precaution as to the crowd that would be sure to assemble, that great numbers were crushed to death. This is a conspicuous modern instance; and it well illustrates the principle referred to.

In the case of David's bringing the Ark to Jerusalem, it is evident that the thought of *the thing itself*, — the movement, and all that was likely to arise from it, so filled the mind of the King, as well as the priests and the Levites concerned that this special requirement of the Law was forgotten. This forgetfulness had very serious consequences, which we shall carefully consider.

Instead of arrangements being made for the Ark to be *carried* by four men, holding the staves, as provided in the Law, a *new cart*, or carriage had been made on which the Ark was placed for the journey, the cart being drawn by oxen.

Very probably it was thought to add dignity to the great ceremony by this treatment. The result, however, proved that it was dangerous to *add* to the requirements of the law, which is, indeed, one of the things against which there is an express warning in the closing words of the Book of Revelation. (The disregard of this has opened the floodgate to errors that have corrupted and desolated the Christian Church, from early times even to this day.)

Now, let us note what happened. During the journey over those mountain tracks, at one particular spot, the cart shook so much that there seemed danger of the Ark falling out. One of the young men who were in charge of the cart, Uzzah, by name, *put forth his hand to the Ark of God, and took hold of it*;—a very natural proceeding in the circumstances.

But, now, we read, with a certain kind of shock,—that *the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzzah, and God smote him there for his error; and there he died by the Ark of God.* (Chap. vi., 7.) A terrible event, indeed, and one that cast a shadow over the whole great ceremony; for a great ceremony it was; a grand celebration by bands of music, of all manner of instruments,—*harps and cornets and cymbals*,—reminding us of a coronation ceremony in Westminster Abbey. This death, indeed, was so great a shock to David that he put a stop to the whole proceedings; caused the Ark to be carried aside to the nearest house, dispersed the assembly, and abandoned altogether, for a time, the idea of bringing it to Jerusalem. And he called the name of the place PEREZ-UZZAH,—meaning the “breach,” or “breaking” of Uzzah—equivalent to “the place where Uzzah was killed,”—which name it retained. Similar instances of naming after disastrous occurrences are very common amongst ourselves, as, for instance, “*The Bloody Pond*,” near Lake George where a terrible massacre took place in the old wars, or “*Dead Man’s Island*,” near Vancouver (1899.)

But such an occurrence as this demands consideration, for the enemies of Divine truth are not slow to seize upon such events as evidences of an arbitrary, cruel, and vindictive

character in the God of Israel, and such as go to assimilate Him to the bloody and cruel Moloch, the god of the heathen Ammonites.

For the punishment seems out of all proportion to the offence. Even if the punishment of death was plainly threatened in the Law, against any person who touched the Ark, it seems certain that during the period of the Judges, when the ordinances of religion were so much neglected, and even down to the time of Samuel, when the Ark was taken to the army, the ordinance as to its being invariably carried on staves must have been neglected. And, if it had fallen into disuse, and no punishment had followed, nothing could be more natural than that the precept and punishment alike should be forgotten.

Forgotten it certainly must have been by the people ; if not by the Levites and the priests. If then, the letter of the law had been transgressed with impunity so long, why was such a terrible example made in this case ? Why was this unfortunate man, Uzzah, singled out as an object of Divine wrath when (in all probability) many others had done the same thing with impunity ?

This is one of the serious questions which confront us with regard to certain actions of the Supreme Lord, which are narrated in the Old Testament, but not explained.

That the Supreme Judge must do right is one of the foundation truths lying at the very base of all our conceptions of God as He is revealed to us in the Scriptures. A God of righteousness, a God of truth, and without iniquity, just and pure and right is He. (Deut. xxxii., 4)—This is the revelation. And when anything is done which appears to be contrary to this conception, it is with reason that we suspend or distrust our judgment, or consider that there may be other circumstances, not revealed, or unknown to us, which would alter our conclusion. Yet, although we may be sure that God must be righteous, and be justified in what He does, it is our duty to weigh circumstances carefully, and endeavour, if we can, to understand the reason for actions that, at first sight, may seem unreasonable.

Now, with respect to this man, Uzzah, there can scarcely be a doubt that he was a priest himself. So we should judge

his father to have been from what is said in 1 Samuel vii., verse i. If so, then, his sons were priests too. For the priesthood went by hereditary descent. Consequently, they ought to have known the requirements of the Law as to the manner of carrying the Ark, and also the penalty for touching it.

Moreover, it had been in the house of their father for many years. It is scarcely possible, this being so, that the sons should have remained in ignorance of the Law respecting it. But, if they knew, as doubtless they did, what was the proper mode of moving the Ark, it was their duty, as priests, to see that the Law was complied with. And compliance would be perfectly easy. For, even supposing that the staves had been lost, new ones could have been made without difficulty. Further, though the Law may have been allowed to remain in abeyance, in troubled times, yet now that its observances as to worship were to be re-established, and on a more formal and permanent basis than ever, it was necessary to impress deeply on the minds of that generation, Priests, Levites, and people alike, that the precepts of the ceremonial law must not be trifled with, and that what the Law had declared to be sacred must not be treated as common. For the occasion was one in which a lesson could be given that would be conveyed to all parts of the land, and would never be forgotten. There being tens of thousands present, from all parts of Israel, this lesson of the Majesty of the great King would be learned by men even from the most distant tribes.

The event, however, made a profound impression upon David himself. The narrative says he was *displeased*, a word which implies a sort of censure upon the Divine Majesty. This, however, is not the exact sense of the original, which rather conveys the idea of being "pained," or "distressed,"—mingled with a certain apprehension and alarm. For he said: "*How shall the Ark of the Lord come to me?*"

This event, doubtless, led him to consider carefully the directions of the Law concerning it, for when the Ark was finally removed it was properly *borne* by Levites, according to the Law's requirement. (1. Chron. xv.) And let it

always be borne in mind that none of these requirements were either difficult to understand or burdensome to carry out ; there were none that called for anything more than such attention as men are in the habit of giving to the ordinary affairs of life.

The *heavy burdens* and *grievous to be borne* spoken of by our Lord, were additions made by the Pharisees (Matt. xxiii.), and were no part of the *Divine* requirements.

The Ark was brought at last to Jerusalem, after an interval of three months. And, again, a vast concourse assembled at the King's summons, and amidst the most solemn ceremonies, of purification and sacrifice, with the sound of trumpets and all manner of instruments, and choruses of trained singers in their proper order (1. Chron. xv., 17), under the guidance of ASAPH and HEMAN, and others, of whom we read in the Book of Psalms, CHENANIAH, the master of the procession, leading the whole, the Ark entered the gates of Jerusalem with shoutings of thousands and tens of thousands, and rejoicings such as had never been in Israel before.

On that day, (I Chron. XVI.) David delivered a new psalm into the hands of Asaph and his brethern, and this it was that was sung. This composition is given at length in the narrative, and it is now incorporated into the Book of Psalms, part of it being found in Psalm cv., and the remainder in Psalm xvi.

A survival of this composing of new Psalms, to be sung on great occasions, has been witnessed in this generation. Many of the hymns now incorporated into the hymn-books of all churches, were composed by James Montgomery, on the occasion of the annual gathering of Sunday Schools on WhitMonday, in one of the large towns of England. As they assembled in their thousands, they sang, year after year, a hymn composed by the good poet specially for the occasion. Some of these proved to be of lasting value, and are now part of the psalmody of all the churches.

But another action of David, on this great occasion, is somewhat less easy to understand. Clothed in a *robe* of fine

*See Ps-
369.*

linen, and an *ephod* of linen, he took his place with the musicians, playing on his harp. And the record goes on to say that *David danced before the Lord with all his might*; (2. Samuel vi., 14.) and that as the great procession entered the city he was seen by his wife, Michal, "*leaping and dancing before the Lord!*"

Certainly, at the first blush, it seems to us, in this age of the world, a very undignified, and very unkingly proceeding; and one can almost excuse a wife from being vexed—to say the least—at the sight of so great a personage as the King so conducting himself.

But let us consider. This was evidently not the ordinary movement of one who executes a dance in measured time, and to a measured tune; but was, evidently, the violent and spontaneous leaping of one under the exuberance of an unusual excitement; analogous, in fact, to what is related of the lame man who was cured by the Apostles (Acts iii.), and who, when cured, went with them into the Temple, *walking and leaping and praising God!*

Thus did David; and his action on this occasion, an occasion of incomparable national joy, can be perfectly understood when we remember the high poetic and emotional temperament of the man.

And as to the woman, his wife, what she said and did showed only too plainly that she was unworthy to be the wife of such a man as David, in that she was utterly unmoved by the high and solemn celebration and the parallel grandeur of the procession entering the city, thinking only, even at such a time, of the cold proprieties of etiquette.

And it must be said that there are Michals in these days, too.

CHAPTER V.

THE FIRST CONCEPTION OF THE TEMPLE.

(2. Samuel vii. 1 Chronicles xvi.)

In no one thing is it so surely demonstrated that the Mosaic system was not a copy of, or learned from, that of the Egyptians than in the fact that *no provision was made therein for a permanent TEMPLE.* Moses, adopted as a son by the Egyptian King's daughter, brought up as an Egyptian prince, learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, would certainly, in the absence of some higher controlling influence, have so far followed what was the universal practice in the country where all his early life was passed, as to have provided for the erection of a permanent house of worship and sacrifice, as soon as the people were settled in the land of promise.

Temples abounded in Egypt of so solid a character that their ruins remain to this day, holding an indomitable front, and defying the ravages of thousands of years of time. And that this was the universal habit of all ancient nations, the ruins of other great temples testify. In fact, the temples of ancient nations, were by far the most solid and permanent structures erected. For while palaces and buildings for purposes of State and ordinary civil life have utterly perished from Egypt, temples remain still. And this is largely true of Assyria, Greece, and, to some extent, of Rome also. Everything, therefore, points to the idea that if the system of Moses had been a human institution, the conception and working out of one of the great creative minds of the human race, there could not fail to have been provision, under it, for permanent temples of the same character as those of Egypt. For, let us remember, there was a provision in the Mosaic system for a *place* of worship and sacrifice. The

idea of a place (we cannot call it a building) was not overlooked, or omitted, or lightly passed by. It was most carefully provided for, and the manner of it elaborated. Every detail, down to the minutest point, was set down in writing, as a direction to what sort of a place to provide, of what size, what materials, and what shape. In fact, this place was to be the very centre, core, and heart of the whole system of religion given through Moses. Yet, in every particular, it was not only dissimilar to the Egyptian temples, but was absolutely opposite. Instead of a building it was to be a "Tent." Instead of many Temples, in different localities, there was to be only one Tabernacle. And instead of being covered, as the walls of the Temples were with which Moses was familiar with sculptured representations of gods and men, it was most strictly enjoined that the Tabernacle was to be absolutely free from everything of the kind.

It may be rejoined, and with apparent reason, that a Tent was the only possible arrangement; it was a matter of pure necessity of the time, the people were to spend a whole lifetime in the wilderness; how, then, could the Mosaic Law provide for a Temple?

But the laws instituted through Moses made numerous provisions for the life which the people were to live in the land of Canaan; in fact, by far the larger part of the civil and political requirements of the law related to their settled condition.

Nothing would have been more easy, and, apparently, more reasonable, than to provide that when the conquest of Canaan (which God had promised) had been made, a permanent building should replace the temporary one, just as permanent houses and permanent towns would replace the tents and camping places of the wilderness. And in such permanent temple all the ceremonial requirements of the law, such, for example, as those relating to the Ark, the altars, the Tables of incense and shewbread, the daily sacrifice, the libations, the thankofferings and what not, could be even better observed than they could possibly be in a movable Tent. All this is obvious.

But there is not a word of the kind, in the whole compass of the revelation as made of God to Moses. From all which

it may be gathered, first, that the Mosaic system was not the device of a religious genius,—not an evolution, not a development, but a Divine communication, or revelation; and, second, that it would seem to have been the Divine will, as originally communicated, that there should never be any permanent building for a Temple at all.

It was, however, very natural for the King, in a time of peace, *when the Lord had given him rest from his enemies round about*, (but this did not last) to think of the contrast between his own house and the Tabernacle of the Lord. The old Tabernacle had been called a Temple in the time of Eli, the priest; the essential idea of a Temple, not being that it was composed of permanent materials, but that it was the place where God manifested himself.*

David conferred with NATHAN, the prophet, of whom we hear for the first time,—a faithful and courageous man—

*It is evident from several passages in the narrative that although the Ark had been brought from Kirjath-Jearim to Jerusalem, the Tabernacle itself, the Sacred Tent prepared in the time of Moses, had been left standing in its place. The Tent was of course movable. In the time of Eli and the boyhood of Samuel, it was at Shiloh. Afterwards it was removed to Gibeon, both places being in the neighborhood where Saul was born and lived. But it was certainly neglected, and its curtains, covering, and probably some of its furniture and appurtenances, had fallen into decay. The brazen altar was, however, left.

Now, why David did not remove the Tabernacle itself to Jerusalem, the narrative does not inform us. It is certain, however, that he did not. Possibly it may have been in too ruinous a condition to admit of further removal; or it may have been considered to be, in its then condition, not suitable for a capital city. At any rate, it is certain that David prepared another Tabernacle for the ark, and that it was in this Tabernacle that the great musical services were held which he organized. Here, also, were celebrated sacrifices and burnt offerings. Doubtless all this was with the sanction of Abiathar, the high priest, and other priests and levites, for Abiathar was always with David.

This new tabernacle was, like David's palace, on Mount Zion, the site of the Temple of Solomon being then outside the limits of the city, and separated from it by a deep valley. The tabernacle of David and its musical services gave a sacred character to Mount Zion which is reflected in many of the Psalms, and prophetic writings, and has been perpetuated in a spiritual application to the Church of God even in these days, as witness such hymns as

Glorious things of thee are spoken,
Zion, city of our God!

And what David said is creditable to his good feeling :—
"See, now,—I dwell in an house of cedar, but the Ark of God dwelleth within curtains ;" an anomaly surely. (Let us note, he does not call the Tabernacle the dwelling of God, but the dwelling of the Ark.) Nathan answers the King : *Go, do all that is in thine heart, for the Lord is with thee !* The prophet said this in all honesty, but the event proved that this was not what is called *the word of the Lord*, but only his own private opinion. The fact of true prophets having thus made mistakes when speaking in their own name has already been referred to in the case of Samuel (1 Sam. xvi.) And thus it was with Nathan. For in the same night, the prophet received a very striking message from God ; a message that must have struck both himself and David with a strange confusion. *"Go,"* said the message—*"go,—and tell my servant, David, 'Shalt thou build me an house for ME to dwell in ?'"*

There is a tone of Divine sarcasm and of indignation in these opening words of the message.—What !—dost thou, David, speak of the Eternal God, the Ruler of the Heavens and the Earth as if he was a man like thyself ? Thou needest a house to shelter thee. Does the Maker of all things need a house built of wood or stone to shelter HIM ? And is the Majesty of Heaven to be indebted to a child of the dust for a place in which to rest ?

Striking, indeed, is this train of thought ; and the Divine message follows it up by the startling query : *"Did I ever speak a word,—during all the time that I have walked with Israel"* (walked with Israel, marched at their head, in fact !) saying : *"Why do you not build me an house of cedar ?"*

How the Divine Wisdom brings both prophet and king back to the very foundation principles of their religion :—

What ?—is implied in this query, is the Eternal and Omnipresent Jehovah, the God of Israel, to be put on a level with the gods of the nations who are only magnified men ? who eat and drink, and sleep, and need houses to dwell in ?

In after days, when the design of building a permanent Temple was carried out by Solomon, and the great ceremony of dedication took place, he uttered what sounds almost

like an apology for presuming to think of building a house for the Living God at all :—

"But will God," he says, (1 Kings viii.) with a profound reverence, "*indeed, dwell on the earth ? Behold, the heaven, and heaven of heavens, cannot contain Him, how much less this house which I have built !*" Here speaks the man who is enlightened by the Spirit of God ; and, being so enlightened, comprehends the difference between the very ground and principle of the heathen idea of God, and of a house for such a god, and the idea of the Eternal, Immortal, Invisible Creator and Ruler of the Universe, who cannot be represented by any similitude, and whose only real dwelling is the soul of man.

Thus, indeed, spake, in after years, the great prophet whose forecasts of the new and spiritual dispensation seem almost descriptions of what *has been* rather than prophecies of what *is to be*.—"For thus saith the High and Lofty One, that inhabiteth Eternity, whose name is Holy ; I dwell in the high and holy place ;—with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones." (Isaiah vii., 15.) The lofty one THAT INHABITETH ETERNITY ! What a grand conception ! How then can he inhabit a house of man's building ? Is He an APIS to have a house at Karnak ; or a JUPITER, or MINERVA, or DIANA to have a Temple at Athens, Rome or Ephesus, and there to be represented by an image carved by the hand of a skilful sculptor, out of a piece of marble or ivory ?

And well did the apostle of the Gentiles, when standing on Mars Hill, in Athens, with the glorious Parthenon and other noble temples around him, understand the truth as he said to the assembly of cultivated Greeks : "*God—that made the world, and all things therein, seeing that He is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands !*" And, afterwards, writing to the Christians of Corinth, where other great temples adorned the city—the ruins of which are still standing,—he reveals to them the great truth that the soul of the Christian man is the real temple and dwelling place of God. "*Know ye not,*" he exclaims—(and, let us bear in mind, he is writing by the

Holy Ghost), that "**YE ARE THE TEMPLE OF GOD,—and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you**" (1 Cor. iii., 16), enunciating which truth, he lifts the mind of these Gentiles above any longing for architectural development, or regret for the noble buildings they have forsaken. To the same effect he writes* to the Hebrew Christians, drawing off their thoughts from the imposing ritual of the Temple at Jerusalem, which many of them might fondly regret,—to the great spiritual realities which that ritual was intended to embody. For, if they looked still upon the Temple at Jerusalem, as God's house,—the Apostle taught them that they, themselves, were the true house of God. (Hebrew iii.)

Thus, in this narrative of the life of David, we find an illustration of the great truth that the Old Testament was not contrary to the New. The great spiritual ideas as to the Divine Being and the way to honor him, which were so fully opened up by Jesus Christ and his apostles, are to be found, in germ and substance, in those very communications which preceded the building of the first Temple. The true house of God cannot be built by human hands : this is God's message to David by the prophet.

But, along with this message, which came as a sort of sharp rebuke, there came a very tender unfolding of what was to come, both to David's own house and nation, and also as to this permanent building which he has been proposing. For the Divine love which had *taken him from following the sheep, and accompanied him in all his wanderings*, which had *cut off his enemies and made him a name*, would still be about him, and *make him an house*. (v. 8.) He and his should be visited with the rod of discipline,—severe discipline, indeed, in case they transgressed (and the after life of David himself proved how terribly sharp—almost overwhelming—that discipline could be), yet the mercy of God should never be withdrawn altogether : as it had been from

*The canon of the New Testament gives the Apostle Paul as the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, and though modern criticism has cast doubts upon it, that criticism has so often been contradictory and mistaken, that no thoughtful Bible student will pay much attention to it.

Saul. (v. 14, 15.) For, as this solemn message said,* "*And when thy days be fulfilled and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, and I will establish his kingdom.*" It is at this point that the remarkable announcement is made that a son of David shall build—*not a house of God*, (let that be carefully marked), but *a house for my Name*; (v. 13), manifestly a house in which the name of Almighty God is to be set forth by sacrifice, offering, and ceremony. While the Lord of heaven and earth was deeply displeased at the irreverent idea of David, in coupling together the ideas of his own house and a house for the Eternal God,—it was intimated that the time would come—viz., in the time of David's son—when a house—as distinguished from a tent—might be provided for sacrifice and offering; a permanent structure in one settled place, instead of a temporary one that could be moved from one place to another. In this there is nothing whatever contrary to the Divine Majesty.

Thus spake the prophet Nathan by the word of the Lord.

On hearing all this, David is profoundly moved; moved, first, by that deep sense of nothingness which characterized so many of the great and good men of the scripture times. "*Who am I?*" said the one, who, in some respects, was the greatest of them all, even MOSES. Yet, what man, in all the world, was like him, who being brought up a prince of Egypt (and who might have been a king—a Pharaoh)—deliberately sacrificed all out of love to his own people and his faith in God. "*Who am I?*" said Gideon,—chosen to obtain a marvellous victory over Midian.—And "*who am I?*" said Saul, in his early days of modesty and zeal for God. And a greater Saul by far, even Saul of Tarsus, *who is also called PAUL*, was so little in his own eyes that he writes himself down as *less than the least of all saints*, and *not worthy to be an apostle*. And this though he could and did magnify his office to its fullest extent.

*The idea that the central place of worship arose in connection with the writing of the Book of Deuteronomy long after David's time is likely nearly all the other critical ideas of Wellhausen and other German scholars, too ill-considered and fanciful to be worthy of attention. These men are for, the most part, blind leaders of the blind.

Thus, then, David, hearing of the future of his line, and that a son of his should build the house for God's name; also that the kingdom should remain in his house, and that the mercy of God should never depart from it,—first bows before God in the most profound humility,—and then rises into glorious strains of praise and acknowledgment of God's wonderful calling out of Israel, and his guidance and mercy towards the people he has chosen (v. 18 to end), closing with these words: "*And, now, O Lord God, Thou art that God, and Thy words be true, and Thou hast promised this goodness unto Thy servant . . . for Thou, O Lord, hast spoken it,—and, with Thy blessing, let the house of Thy servant be blessed for ever.*" (v. 29.)

BLESSED FOR EVER! Indeed, this prayer has been answered in a sense far beyond anything that even one like David could have dreamed of. For, after the line of David had continued on the throne for centuries, the throne itself was overturned by invasion. But, on the ruins of that earthly throne, and from the house and family of David, there arose another throne and kingdom, which still subsists on the earth, not bounded by one race, nation or country, but embracing *all nations*; and bringing blessing; the blessing promised thousands of years ago, *to all the families of the earth*, through Jesus Christ, the Son of David and Son of God. It is this which links Gentile people like ourselves to this line of David, and which gives us a permanent interest in these ancient chronicles, for they belong to us as much as they do to the race originally concerned in them. We, who believe in the Divine Son of David, are heirs of the blessings and promises; and we have an assurance that these blessings and promises are not of this transitory sphere only, but stretch on to that eternal world which was dimly shadowed forth in the old dispensation, but has been brought fully to light in the New.

Nothing more is heard of this project of a Temple for many years,—not until the closing year of David's life. But in the meantime (and, indeed, the work was begun already), he had spent much pains and labor in perfecting the musical arrangements of the sanctuary he had prepared on

Mount Zion, as well as in seeing that the courses of the priests were properly distributed. He appointed (1 Chron. xvi.), *certain Levites to minister before the Ark of the Lord, and to record, and to thank and praise the Lord God of Israel ; Asaph, the Chief, and many others with him,—Heman and Jeduthun also, who played on musical instruments, harps, cymbals of brass,—psalteries and cornets.* Then there were singers, *Chenaiah*, being chief, of whom it is said,—*he instructed about the song because he was skilful.*

These names and instruments occur frequently in the Book of Psalms ; and it is evident that David's thoughts in time of peace were much occupied with the services of the sanctuary, and that the Spirit of God moved him again and again, drawing out his natural poetic genius to celebrate in song the deliverances and the dangers, the sorrows and successes, the temptations and the stumblings, as well as the spiritual triumphs and hopes of his own experience, as well as the varied experiences of his nation, which came to be set to music and used in the services of the sanctuary.

In fact, the arrangements for that service were so perfected in David's time, that they needed no further development.

CHAPTER VI.

DAVID'S WARS.—HIS KINDNESS TO JONATHAN'S SON.

(2 Samuel viii., ix., x.)

The small space devoted in Scripture narrative to the wars and conquests of David, in comparison with that devoted to matters of moral import is strikingly characteristic, and illustrates the difference between the Divine method and the human. For, it is certain, that if a mere human hand had penned the chronicle, far more space would have been given to the narrative of these wars, for they must, from their variety, the extent of territory they embraced, and the striking results obtained, have abounded in such incidents as would have been the delight of a secular historian to chronicle. But it cannot be too frequently remembered that these Scripture narratives are not ordinary histories. It is not a history of the Jews,—simply a history, that is before us, but a chronicle of incidents in the lives of certain members of the Israelitish race such as will be for our "learning," our *correction*, our warning, our *instruction in righteousness*. There are, in addition, many chronicles of names and genealogies, which have no special value and significance now, though they, undoubtedly had once, and continued to have for hundreds of years after they were written.

The wars and conquests of David, then, are very slightly referred to. The incidents of many wars, and doubtless, many battles and sieges, are compressed into two short chapters, while the story of David's terrible fall into sin, and the punishment that befel him therefor (which a secular chronicler would almost certainly have passed lightly over, or omitted altogether), is told with a fulness of detail that must

strike forcibly upon the attention of every man that reads of it.

Chapter VIII. opens with a statement,—in one *verse* only, that David smote and *subdued the Philistines*. This subjugation was so complete that we hear no more of them, except in occasional outbreaks, easily suppressed, for many generations.

Then, in one other verse, we read that he *smote MOAB*. In this verse there is a statement of a mode of procedure which is difficult to understand ; whether it refers to cities or to prisoners taken in war. It probably indicates some mode of trial by lot ; as to who should be put to death and who should be kept alive. (v. 2.)

But the end of the war with them was that *they became David's servants*, and brought *gifts* ; agreeing, in fact, to be a tributary nation, as Israel itself was to Assyria and Babylon many ages afterwards.

Philistia was on the western frontier of Israel, Moab, on the eastern. Both were dangerous neighbours, but these two being subdued, David's kingdom was now secure on three sides. For the Amalekite marauders of the southern desert had been smitten before.

David, now, by unforeseen circumstances, has his attention drawn to the North. It has been noticed before that in the chronicles of war, in these books of Samuel, but little attention has been paid to the exact *order* of events. The events themselves are told vividly, forcibly, and so as to strike attention ; and so that wise lessons of instruction can easily be drawn from them. But, as has been said, these narratives are not of the nature of a history in the modern sense of the word ; and things are much more generally related in the order of *character* than in the order of *time*. This is specially the case with military matters.

After the subjugation of Moab and Philistia, David, we are told, smote Hada-dezer, a Syrian chieftain. But for what reason he should turn his arms northward, does not appear in this eighth chapter. David was not like one of the great warriors who go abroad conquering and subduing merely for the sake of conquest, like the Kings of Assyria and Persia ; like Alexander and Julius Ceasar, like Charle-

magne or Napoleon. David was a true soldier, a man of real military genius, but not a man of ambition to conquer the world. He would, therefore, not be likely to carry his arms into Syria unless for some reason, and that reason we find in Chapter X :

A former king of the Ammonites, now deceased, had shewn David some kindness in his lifetime ; but what it was is not recorded. Probably it was during the time when David had to escape to the countries beyond the Dead Sea to escape Saul's vengeance.

David did not forget such kindnesses ; we have abundant evidence of this ; for his way was not the "way of the world."

After the King's death, therefore, David sent a message of sympathy to Hanun, the King's successor.

But the princes of Ammon (for theirs was the way of the world), stirred up the young King to jealousy : "*Thinkest thou,*" they said, "*that David hath sent these messengers out of respect to thy father ?* Nay. . . . He has sent them to *spy out the city that he may overthrow it.*"

The rash young prince listened only too readily to this, and sent the messengers of David back, having put the most gross indignities upon them. (v. 4.) This young man's father, Nahash, though he had shewn kindness to David, had threatened to put out the right eyes of the men of Jabesh Gilead (1 Samuel xi., 2), just as the Philistines had done to Samson when they had captured him. This was the barbarous way in which war was carried on by these semi-civilized tribes, very much as war was carried on by the Indian tribes of our own country.

David was, naturally, most indignant. What makes a man more indignant than for kindness to be repaid with insult ? And whatever might have been his feeling with regard to injuries to himself personally, he could not possibly pass by, as King of Israel, so gross an outrage as had been committed on the persons of Israelites, his subjects.

The Ammonites, however, made the first move. Anticipating trouble, they applied to the Syrian prince for assistance : *hiring* soldiers from them, as it is expressed, and gathering a great force. (v. 6.) Then David sent an army,

under that most capable general, Joab, who had his brother, Abishai, with him. Joab, we are told, arranged the host in two divisions, one of them opposed to the Ammonites, and the other, to the Syrians. What he said to his brother has a very modern sound ; much like what we might imagine Wellington said to Blucher when they were about to confront Napoleon.

He said to Abishai (v. 11), "*If the Syrians be too strong for me, then thou shalt help me ; but if the children of Ammon be too strong for thee, then I will come and help thee.*" And he put out to him this stirring proclamation, doubtless, intended for the soldiers, as well as for their captain : "*Be of good courage, and let us play the men, for our people, and for the cities of our God. And the Lord do that which seemeth Him good !*"

There shines out the spirit of the devout soldier, exemplified again and again in the after history of Israel ; and also, let us be thankful to say, in the history of England, too : "Trust in God, and pray, but *keep your powder dry,*" Cromwell is said to have told his soldiers, before Dunbar. So Joab :—"Be of good courage. Play the man. But look up to heaven for help." Even so ;—and what is true piety is true philosophy also.

The Ammonites were defeated, and their allies brought disaster on themselves, for David himself now took the field against Hadadezer, the principal Syrian prince, defeated him, took great spoil, put garrisons of his own in the Syrian cities, and reduced the region round about Damascus to the position of a province paying tribute.

Thus far there is nothing in these wars to distinguish them from such as are constantly occurring between nations.

But in the disposition of the spoils, an element was introduced which marked the character of David as a man of high regard for the services of God's sanctuary : that very quality in him, which had led him to be singled out as a man after God's own heart. (1 Sam. xiii., 14.)

The spoils consisted partly of certain *shields of Gold*—that were on the servants of Hadadezer,—a few of his own body-guard, doubtless ; and partly of great quantities of brass. All this he brought to Jerusalem, and *dedicated to the Lord*, as well as other vessels of gold and silver and brass, presented

to him by another Syrian prince, who had had his own quarrel with Hadadzer,—and who was glad to hear of his overthrow by David. (Chap. viii., v. 10.)

These conflicts with Ammonites, and with their Syrian allies in the region beyond the Dead Sea (generally called in these narratives the Salt Sea, and its lower shores, the *valley of Salt* (v. 13), a true topographical touch), brought out the forces of the adjoining people of Edom against David. Their rocky strongholds, however (and tremendous places they are, as modern travellers well know), were all taken by David. He put garrisons also into them, *throughout Edom*, and the Edomites became his servants.

These wars must have occupied considerable time ; they were probably, in fact, spread over many years of his reign, and they resulted in the gradual accumulation in Jerusalem of an immense quantity of gold and silver, as well as of brass, all which might have been appropriated by David to the enrichment of himself and his family, or to the adornment of his palace and the buildings connected therewith. But he did nothing of the kind. The testimony is that he *dedicated all those treasures to the Lord*. We shall find, hereafter, that these treasures were all used in the building of the famous Temple of the Lord, generally called by the name of Solomon. But David was the real originator of this Temple ; indeed, he was far more. For not only did he conceive the idea, but he drew all the *plans* on which it was built. (1 Chron. xxviii.), and gave *patterns of all the vessels* to be employed therein. It was he also that prepared, in all their vast variety, the materials of stone, of wood, of iron, of brass, of silver, of gold and of precious stones, which were subsequently wrought into the fabric by his son. (1 Chron. xxix.)

And when we wonder, as well we may, on reading the last named chapter, how such an accumulation of costly treasures could possibly be found in such a small country as the land of Israel, we shall find the secret unveiled in the statement that he *dedicated unto the Lord* the presents that were sent him by his friends and allies, as well as the spoils of all nations which he subdued : viz., of Syria and of Moab, and of the children of Ammon, and of the Philistines, and of

Amalek, and of the spoil of Hadadzezer, son of Rehob, King of Zobah. (v. 12.)

All these were nations on his immediate border ; and all these wars were undertaken, apparently, in defence of his kingdom, or in vindication of his people, and not in a spirit of aggression and conquest. For it is certain that if David had had the *disposition*, as he certainly had the military ability, of the great world-conquerors, he would have carried his arms beyond Amalek to Egypt, and beyond Syria to Assyria and Babylon. But he had no such ambition. When he had secured his kingdom, the next thing we hear of are the conquests of peace : "*He reigned over all Israel, and he executed judgment and justice to all his people.*" (Chap. viii., 15.) And it is certain that he laid the foundation of that condition of peace and security which gave its character to the reign of Solomon.

Of serious wars with other nations David had no more, though, as has been said, there were occasional outbreaks on his borders. But the dark shadow of something infinitely worse than foreign wars, even rebellion and civil strife, from the bosom of his own family, darkened his later days ; and the bitterest ingredients in this bitter cup was that it came about as a punishment for his own most grievous sin and heinous crime.

Up to the time, however, when these foreign wars ended, David's conduct was almost without reproach.

About this time it is that we read of another of those fine instances of consideration and remembrance which show that gratitude is not always a sense of favors to come. David never ceased to remember Jonathan, that dear friend of former days, who had loved him so passionately. The days of peace being come, David bethinks him of the house of Saul, now so nearly extinct ; and causes enquiry to be made if any of the family are left. Through an old servant of Saul's he learns of that unfortunate son of Jonathan, who had been let fall by his nurse when fleeing from danger after the disaster of Gilboa. (Chap. iv., 4.)

The child's name was Mephibosheth. The fall caused him to be lame in both his feet, and, in this helpless condition,

he had grown up, being befriended by a family in Gilead (chap. ix., 4), probably one of those who were related to men of Jabesh-Gilead, of whom we have heard before.

David sends for him and speaks to him with characteristic kindness and consideration. "*Fear not,*" the King says,—doubtless seeing that the unfortunate young man was afraid that David might be intending some harm to him—" *I will surely shew thee kindness for Jonathan, thy father's sake, and will restore to thee all the land of Saul, thy father.† and thou shalt eat bread at my table continually.*" This last was a high mark of consideration indeed, and especially, to be valued by such a helpless cripple as Mephibosheth. For even though he had lands and vineyards given to him, they might be improperly administered, and he, a helpless cripple, left in poverty, while his steward and servants were enriching themselves and living luxuriously at his expense. The experience of the world is only too common in this direction. But the provision that he should always have a place at the royal table ensured him comfort for life. And let it be noted how royal the provision was.—For in making known to Ziba, the steward, that the lands of Saul were restored to his son, and charging the steward to administer them, David added, "*Mephibosheth shall eat at my table as one of the King's sons !*" Not at the foot of the table, as was common for dependents, but in the high place, as one of the family. The spirit of loyalty to the memory of Saul, the fallen monarch, and of high generosity and forgiveness of past injuries shines out conspicuously in David's treatment of this his unfortunate grandson. And there is practical wisdom also in the charge to the steward. For he was directed to *bring in the fruits of the lands to David's palace ;*—being thereby given to understand that he would be held accountable therefor, and that there would be an oversight of his doings.

And that this Ziba needed watch to be kept over him is proved by the lying report he made to David when the King was fleeing from Jerusalem after Absalom's rebellion. (Chap. xvi. 3 and chap. xix. 26, 27.)

Thus far, the life and reign of David are almost uni-

formly the career of a man of high and exemplary virtue, a virtue grounded on and arising out of his constant and abiding faith in God ; a faith which shines out conspicuously in his Psalms, and which, like that of the New Testament, worked by love, and bore fruit in righteous and beneficent conduct. But, now, when enemies were subdued, when war had ceased, when the stress and strain of years of wearing anxiety had been succeeded by a time of confidence and peace (though that peace did not last long), then the deadly temptations, incident to ease and luxury, set in, and incidents transpired which one might deem inconceivable, did we not know how deceitful is human nature in its unrestrained manifestations, and to what depths of wickedness a man may fall when the grace of God is not upon him. Yet, in the wonderful wisdom of God, all this was suffered to transpire, that the lesson of watchfulness against the temptations of ease and luxury might be so stamped upon the memory and conscience of succeeding generations as never to be forgotten.

And, certainly, these dark passages in the life of David have been overruled for the glory of God, and the permanent good of mankind.

CHAPTER VII.

THE TYPICAL ASPECT OF DAVID'S WARS.

That the Lord Jesus Christ was the SON OF DAVID, not only by natural descent, but spiritually, is very plainly revealed in the Divine word. He inherited David's Kingdom ; He sat upon his throne ; and, in this connection, it is predicted of Him that he should be a LEADER and COMMANDER *to the people.*" both words expressive of military ideas.

As then, he sat upon David's throne in a spiritual but very real sense, being the King of a separate and redeemed people : *a holy nation, a peculiar people*, so he leads and commands the spiritual forces of his kingdom, in conflict with the powers of spiritual darkness in the world. And there is in all this a close correspondence with the type. For David's wars were with idolatrous nations, and with the powers of the world that were alienated from the Living God. It was the nations that bowed down before the licentious Baal and Ashteroth, or the bloody and cruel Moloch that were subdued by David's arms. And it was the forces of an idolatry that was essentially the same in spirit, though the names were changed, that the Lord Jesus Christ, by his servants, came to break down, subdue, and overthrow.

Yet, there was always most carefully asserted, both in our Lord's teaching and in the works of His chosen servants, the distinction between the old and the new ; between the natural forces and the spiritual. "*My Kingdom is not of this world ; if it were, my servants would fight to prevent my being delivered up,*" said the Lord when arraigned before the great world-power of the time. (John xviii., 36). Yet, he also said : "*I came not to bring peace, but a sword ; not a sword to wound and kill the body, but the sword which proceeded out of his mouth*" (Rev. xix.), even that which

was spoken of Him by Isaiah, the prophet, when he declared that a descendant of Jesse should *smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips should slay the wicked.* (Isaiah xi.)

Thus, then, His great apostle, who was specially designated to preach amongst idolatrous nations, refers to the work he and his helpers were doing as a *War*; a spiritual war, indeed, and waged with spiritual weapons; but a very real and strenuous conflict, a sort of besieging of cities with their walls and towers which were to be *cast down* by the spiritual battering-ram of Divine truth.

Writing to his brethren, in Corinth, that mighty stronghold of pagan power (whose remains still stand to attest it), he declares (2 Corin. x.), that they are actually engaged in *WAR*: "*But the weapons of our warfare are not carnal; but mighty, through God, to the pulling down of strongholds; strongholds, indeed,—the massive temples of Jupiter and other gods that filled the land.* Yet, it was not the material building that filled the apostle's mind; but the vast structure of falsehood, and lying superstitions, and *vain and wicked imaginations*, that were to be *cast down; with every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God.* And, as when a city was taken in olden times, the inhabitants were led away captive, so in this spiritual warfare. When the forces of idolatry are subdued—*every thought is to be brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.*—The obedience of Christ,—the Leader and Commander of the army: His own army; for He is both King and Commander, as the three great conquerors of the world were: Alexander, Caesar, and Napoleon, each of whom was both ruler and commander in chief.

And, writing to the disciples, in Ephesus, where he had waged mighty war by the Spirit against the falsehood and darkness of heathen sorceries, he refers to the Christian war in one of the most familiar passages of the Divine word. (Ephes. vi.) But the scope of this passage has often been sadly narrowed and misunderstood. It does not, as it is so often expounded, refer wholly to the conflict of the individual Christian with the powers of evil in his soul (though that is undoubtedly included), but to the conflict of the soldiers of

Christ's army—(and all His servants are such)—with the *world-powers* of spiritual darkness, not only with the Devil, but with his armies and hosts.

For the expression "*spiritual wickedness*" in that famous twelfth verse, in the original, clearly points, not so much to *principles* of wickedness as to *spirits* of wickedness; personal *powers*, active agents of evil, working the evil designs of the arch-Fiend, their captain.

What these spiritual powers of darkness were, the Ephesian Christians had plainly before their eyes every day, in the devotion paid to the image of the goddess Diana ; and the sorceries, witchcrafts, and wickedness connected therewith. It was against this and kindred idolatries as entrenched in mighty fortresses throughout the whole world that the forces of Christ, the Captain of salvation, were to wage continual conflict. And wage war these armies did. Poor and mean and despised in themselves, they had a mighty faith in their Lord. For in one of the very last of Divine revelations to the servants of God, there is this wonderful vision of the war and its Leader (Rev. xix) : "*I saw heaven opened, and, behold, a WHITE HORSE ; AND HE THAT SAT UPON HIM WAS CALLED FAITHFUL AND TRUE. And in righteousness he doth judge and MAKE WAR. On his head were many crowns, and he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood ; and His name is called the WORD OF GOD. And the armies in heaven followed him, upon white horses (the cavalry of heaven !), and out of His mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations : (this clearly indicates the nature and operation of the forces employed, viz., preaching and teaching, wielding the sword of the Spirit in the power of the Spirit of God). And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written : KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS !*"

Now, considering that the man who wrote this was a prisoner under duress, banished to a solitary island because of the Word of God,—helpless,—humanly speaking,—in the grasp of one of the world-powers of darkness ; the persecuting Emperor Domitian ;—and that nearly all other preachers of the truth, his companions, were driven into holes and corners of the earth,—it was a wonderful triumph of faith in

such a man to represent Christianity as a conquering army, riding in triumph through the world, under the lead of a many-crowned commander, whose word would smite the nations,—and whose title was a greater one than even that of Cæsar.

Yet, the Apostle John clearly saw the secret of this display of conquering power, by the *Vesture dipped in Blood*, the all-subduing power of the Cross—and could he have survived a few centuries, he would have seen what was, outwardly at least (for it was far from such in reality), a fulfilment of his vision in the public announcement of Christianity as the religion of the Empire by a successor of Domitian, who carried the cross on his banner (*en hoc signo vince*), and under whom and his Christian successors were cast down those strongholds of Pagan idolatry, the marvellous temples, whose ruins remain to this day as an irrefragable witness to the power of that sword which proceeded out of the mouth of the great King.

But alas!—it came to be forgotten that the sword was to be *the sword of the Spirit which was the word of God*. And in process of time the strange spectacle was presented of the leaders of the Christian church assuming the power of this world, and prosecuting the work of pulling down opposing strongholds by carnal weapons, assuming the temporal governorship of choice portions of the world's territory, and having their chief enthroned in the ancient seat of the Cæsars as a world-King. For many generations the sword of the spirit was utterly forgotten, and the sword of secular power employed to put down remonstrance from within as well as anti-Christian power without. What but the blindest ignorance or forgetfulness of the spiritual sword could have roused mediæval Europe to send forth those strange expeditions called Crusades—the most marvellous exhibition of *zeal not according to knowledge* that the world has ever seen;—and what but such blindness, even at the present day, influences the head of the most extensive church in the world to have armed soldiers at the door of his palace, symbols of a secular dominion which he still claims, though it has been taken from him, which secular dominion and weapons were so expressly repudiated by the Divine Head of

the Church, whose representative he professes to be. The developments of Christianity in the world may well excite wonder in the mind of one who considers the teaching of its founder, and in nothing has there been a wider departure from them,—nay, an adoption of their exact opposite,—than in the shape that the Christian war against the “strongholds” and “powers of spiritual darkness” came gradually to assume. Christianity has overthrown the Pagan temples truly, but the Pagan spirit and Pagan ideas have become dominant in the temples devoted, nominally, to the worship of Christ in a large part of Christendom.

The church in Milan where Ambrose preached, and at whose gate, still standing, he repelled the Emperor Theodosius, is said to occupy the site of a heathen temple, whose great altar of porphyry now forms part of the pulpit of the Church. Could the priests of the Pagan era rise and see the priests of this day performing their service, they would hardly recognize any great transformation. The service of to-day, indeed, would rather seem a development of their own.

The “high places” and vain imaginations which the Apostle Paul, by the power of the Spirit and Word of God, through mighty signs and wonders, labored to cast down—and which for a time *were* cast down—have they not been reared up again, under another name and other outward forms, by those who claim exclusively to be the successors of that very Apostle Paul.

Truly, it was so to be in the depths of a wisdom *past finding out*, and there are not obscure hints and indications of it given in the writings of the Apostles themselves.

The Christian conflict now is therefore not only against systems of idolatry, such as those of India and China, and of falsehood, such as that of Mohammed, but against the *vain imaginations* and *high things* that have corrupted so much of the Church of Christ itself. For this conflict, it is evident that no sword will avail but the *Sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God*. Legislative enactment, suits at law, repression by force—these are the weapons of this world. They avail nothing, as all experience proves.

To any Christian man who looks either at the corruptions within the Christian church or at the strongholds of *spiritual* darkness in heathen or Mohammedan countries, or at the abounding wickedness in those that are nominally Christian, and whose spirit is *stirred within him* at the prospect, no words can be so cheering and so stimulating to action as the words of the Apostle, which still sound like a trumpet-call throughout Christendom:—

"For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God, to the pulling down of fortresses, casting down human conceptions, and every great system that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into entire subjugation every thought to the obedience of Christ." (The translation is somewhat varied, but is true to the original.)

Here is a power adequate to the desired result. Looking at this power, no man will be cast down, no matter how impregnable the strongholds of evil around him may seem to be. When once this great idea has been grasped, the sole consideration will be, what are the best means for bringing these forces to bear upon the world?

Of these there are, as we know, many developments. There is the Christian Church in its many forms and organizations—not used by any means as it should be as an aggressive force against the powers of evil. For, generally speaking, in its organized form, it is almost solely occupied in what may be called a work of *Defence*—that is, in strengthening and helping its own members to hold their own in conflict with the powers of evil. But some churches, as a part of their organization, carry on aggressive warfare, and send out men, well armed and equipped, to attack the strongholds of vice at home and heathenism abroad.

In other cases, societies have arisen out of churches, yet closely connected with them, for doing the same work. Then, again, there are private associations of individuals spreading themselves over the domain of heathendom, taking active part in the conflict; and there are also private individuals, unconnected with any organization, choosing posts

of their own in the immense field; and, finally, there is that remarkable organization of these times which gives itself a military title, and works wholly by military methods, whose end, however, is wholly spiritual and aggressive, taking for its own special work the hardest field of all, and attacking strongholds which seem to defy all the ordinary powers of the church.

Yet these, when all put together, numerous and powerful as they seem, are, humanly speaking, but as a child assaulting a giant. And one can imagine Satan and the evil spirits, his emissaries, and men of the world in sympathy with them, looking on with contempt, and scorning the feeble forces that attempt to overthrow his strongholds, even as Sanballat and Tobiah laughed at good Nehemiah when rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem. And so they might continue, were these forces only human. But a survey of the position only brings out more and more forcibly the old Apostolic truth (Romans xv. 18) that the nations are to be brought to obedience, *through mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God*, and that when these non-carnal weapons are *mighty through God*, then they can pull down strongholds, and bring every thought into captivity to Christ.

Otherwise, all possible weapons, organizations, machinery are mere dry bones.

But though all churches do not, as churches, pursue this warfare, there can be no doubt that it is the duty of each individual disciple of Christ to take his share in it. Some can go out into *the high places of the field*, but obviously not many. The bulk of Christian men and women everywhere must always be laboring in the work of this world, "as it may please God to call them." But those who so labor are, by that very labor, enabled to furnish the sinews of war to those who are actually fighting; and this they are bound to do; in fact, they *are* doing it, to a certain extent, continually. Then there are those that "*lift up holy hands*" in prayer, sustaining the fighters in that manner, as Moses did Joshua in the battle against Amalek. This should comprise the whole body of disciples, and certainly all Christian congregations are bound to take their share in the work.

One thing, however, has been made clear by long experience, viz., that the Spirit of God has worked, and is working, through diverse organizations, provided only that they preach the truth as revealed in the word of that same Spirit. Many soldiers in the field, and those who send them, have conscientious objections to the form under which other soldiers are organized and equipped. But it is made manifest from time to time—sometimes in this field, sometimes in that—that the Divine Spirit passes by and ignores all such objections and limitations. *He divideth His gifts, as He will*, to every church and every organization that preaches the truth. The Plymouth Brother, who holds that all churches of the present are branches of the great apostacy, and who could by no means have communion with any of them, is constrained to acknowledge that, with regard to some to which he has the very strongest objection, there is, in their operations against the strongholds of the Devil, the manifest presence and power of the Spirit. And, vice versa, the most strenuous upholder of ecclesiastical form, who can scarcely conceive that Christ can be present in assemblies of those who differ from him, is constrained, in like manner, by the logic of events, to see that his ideas are not shared by the great *Leader and Commander* of the Army of God.

But when will all these spiritual soldiers learn to see from this Divine point in view !

To return to the wars of David, it is in the light of this typical application—which is no fancy, but an undoubted truth, and perfectly reasonable—that the many passages in the Psalms which have a military bearing can now be read by Christian people with profit.

Thus, when we read in Psalm lxviii., *Let God arise, and let his enemies be scattered*; or in Psalm xviii., *He sent out his arrows and scattered them, he shot out lightning and discomfited them*; or in Psalm cxliv., *Blessed be the Lord, my strength, which teacheth my hands to war, and my fingers to fight*, and numerous passages of like import—if we simply think of them in connection with David the King of Israel, they will have merely a literary interest, and be useless for Christian purposes. But let us apply them to the Son of

David, the Captain of our Salvation, the Leader and Commander of God's spiritual forces—then they become, all of them in their measure, instinct with a spiritual vitality, and full of stimulating power for present-day conflicts, giving assurance that ultimately the strongholds of evil will be stormed and taken.

CHAPTER VIII.

DAVID'S FALL.

2 Samuel xi.

If any person, having only a limited or superficial knowledge of human nature (and there are some such, even amongst the learned), and knowing of David's life and the developments of his character up to this period, had been asked, would it be possible for this man to fall into such a horrible pit of iniquity as is recorded in this chapter, he would almost certainly have replied, no. Even if such a person were so well read in ancient literature as to be aware that adultery and murder were so common in high places as scarcely to excite either remark or reprobation, and that such villanous deeds were commonly ascribed to the heathen gods, he would still be sceptical as to the possibility of such deeds being done by an Israelite, brought up under the influence of Divine institutions as delivered by the hand of Moses. Still more would he deem it ~~impossible~~, and indeed almost impossible, in the case of a man who had been so filled with Divine inspiration as to compose those Psalms of undying preciousness and beauty, in which every phase of a devout and chastened soul is reflected, and every thought and desire of sanctified aspiration is expressed. *inculcated*

He might say that it was quite conceivable that a good man, and even a man of eminent goodness, might be overcome by a sudden and fierce temptation, coming upon him at an unguarded moment, and carrying him away to a momentarily lapse from uprightness. But that such a man should be not only carried away in an unguarded moment to some sudden act of inconsistency, but should be so tempted as to sin deliberately and after due time for reflection; that he should then follow up such wrong doing by

deliberate and carefully-planned acts of scandalous wickedness; and, further still, that such a man, after perpetrating such deliberate wickedness, should remain for a long period in absolute unconsciousness of wrong doing—in a state, in fact, of hard insensibility—such a series of events as this would be deemed, not only without parallel, but utterly beyond the bounds of credibility. Such a tale might indeed be invented by the enemies of the Lord, and made an occasion for people to blaspheme; such a vile calumny might be circulated by the ungodly, anxious only to prove all men to be as wicked as themselves. These things were conceivable, for such things have been. No calumny too scandalous, no slander too base for wicked men to invent and circulate, to the damage of good and holy men whose testimony against their wickedness was becoming unbearable. And of this character any man might conceive such a story, as this chapter relates to be, viz.,—impossible, inconceivable. The story is a slanderous invention of the enemy; that would be the verdict.

But how confounding to all such conclusions is the fact that the narrative is a portion of that very life of David which tells of all his goodness, his generous kindness, his forgiveness of enemies, his holy aspirations, his care for God's sanctuary. It is no slander. The voice is not the voice of calumny, but the sorrowful chronicle of a faithful and true witness, chronicled, indeed, for purposes of deep instruction and warning to men in *the ages to come*; and sounding through the world now with as loud and solemn an accent as it did in the ages past. For let us remember, there was every possible inducement in a mere human chronicler, for the sake of the honor of his nation, to cast a veil over this dark episode in the life of such a hero as David. There was indeed every inducement to do this, apparently for the sake of the honor of God, the God whom David served, and whose praises David had so often sung. Humanly speaking, and at first sight, it would be very undesirable—so most good men would think—to perpetuate the memory of such wickedness. If it had been matter of consideration with a company, let us say, of the elders of

Israel, shall these things be chronicled, or shall they be buried in oblivion? it is all but certain that the voice of the assembly would have been for them not to be mentioned at all, but to be wholly passed by, as they indeed are in the narrative of the Book of Chronicles.

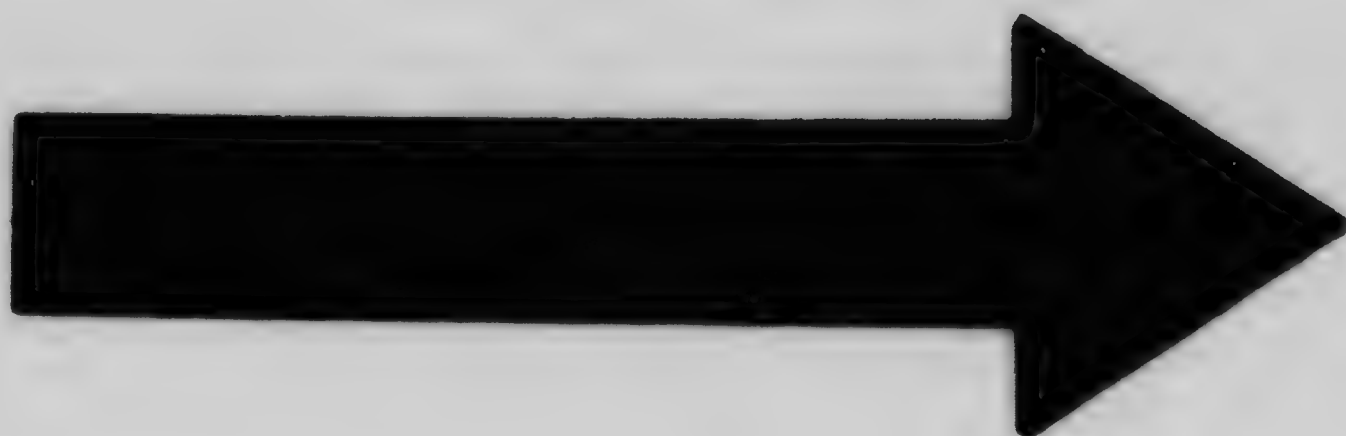
But in those narratives we are reminded, not once or twice, that *the Lord seeth not as man seeth*.—*My thoughts are not your thoughts, saith the Lord.* (Isaiah lv. 8.) The Divine Spirit who, in infinite wisdom, ordered the course of these narratives, saw fit to preserve the memory for all time of the terrible fall of this man, anointed of the Lord though he was. And it has been the wisdom of the church and of good men in all ages, to gather the most solemn lessons therefrom of warning and instruction that can possibly be learned.

For the narrative, terrible as it is, has many-sided lessons of instruction.

David, for some reason passing a sleepless night, rises and walks on the flat roof of his palace, from whence many houses of his subjects were visible. So it is in Jerusalem to-day. His attention was attracted by a light in one of the windows of a neighbouring house, and looking in he sees, as the narrative states, *a woman washing herself; and the woman was very beautiful to look upon.*

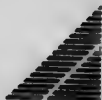
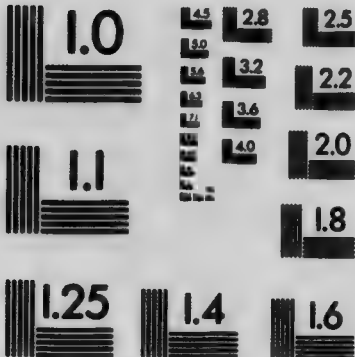
A wise and prudent man would have instantly turned away; but in this unguarded moment Satan, ever watchful, enters into the man's soul, kindling lust. And the flame of evil desire being kindled, goes on burning more and more fiercely, as is the wont of evil desire in strong and passionate natures. Yet he had time to reflect, for it was apparently the next day that he enquired who the woman was. Then he learned that she was married, her husband being one of his own soldiers.

Here there was an opportunity to pause and reflect. She was a married woman. But what he did was the second step—of a swift fall into *the horrible pit and the miry clay*, of which he speaks in one of his psalms (Psalm xl. 2). Had she been unmarried, what he did would have been a grievous sin; but being a married woman, the sin was double-dyed,



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for it involved the doing to her husband of the most shameful wrong that one man can do to another. But the fire of evil passion was burning, as the fire of any evil passion is sure to go on burning, with increasing violence, so long as it is not stopped by reflection and prayer. Why, we may exclaim, on reading this narrative, why *did* he not reflect? Why did he not, as Joseph did, even in a greater temptation, bethink him of that all-watchful eye that marks the doings of men, and say like him, how *can* I do this great wickedness and sin against God!

But so it was not to be. The first downward step is the indulging of evil desire, instead of checking it. the continuing to look when it was unlawful to look (as our Lord proclaims it in his sermon on the Mount.) But this evil, so far is confined to himself alone. The second has disastrous consequences to two other persons—to the woman, Bathsheba, whose purity was destroyed, and to Uriah, her husband, whose honor was stained and his house invaded by the demon of adultery.

But this was not all. After some time, when it became apparent that Uriah must come to know the deadly wrong that the King had done him, David forms the purpose to get rid of him by murder. This is the third step, and the most horrible of all, for it lands him in the lowest depth of that abyss of iniquity into which he has been sinking ever since the first lustful look. The most appalling aspect of this dark episode is the utter callousness to evil that has now come over the King. It is most noticeable; yet it is only too true to general experience that this particular form of sin does superinduce a greater degree of callousness than any other. Already in these studies that sad declaration of Burns has been quoted, in which (and, alas! he drew upon his own bitter experience for it), he describes the effect of this form of indulgence in the sad lines—

But, oh, it hardens all the heart,
And petrifies the feeling!

And now it is referred to again as having a most vivid illustration in this narrative.

In utter hardness of heart David goes on for months after the ruin he has brought upon the house of his faithful servant, and now he contrives a deliberate plot to murder him. Yet, with an ingenuity inspired by that master of all the craft of temptation, Satan, now in full possession of him, he does this in such a way that it shall appear to have come about in the ordinary course of war.

Not the least noticeable feature of this sad narrative is the revelation it makes of the character of Uriah the Hittite. Being sent for by the King from the scene of war, he is directed, on arriving in Jerusalem, to go down to his own house. What particular object the King had in view in so directing him is hard to say. But the answer of Uriah reveals a striking nobility of character—a loyalty to duty and a self denial which sadly contrasts with the moody and wicked thoughts of his master. For he absolutely refuses to go down to his house and enjoy the comforts of domestic life. No; he is a soldier on duty; his comrades are under canvas in the field—Joab, and the servants of the King, and all the army. *And am I then, he exclaims, to go into mine house, and to eat and drink and to enjoy the society of my wife?* He specially names the society of his wife, as that which at such a time he will not seek, his self-denying refusal standing out in shining contrast to the wickedness of the King in this very particular, and enhancing the enormity of David's guilt in plotting the death of so loyal and noble a man.

Uriah was detained several days in Jerusalem by command of the King, but always abode amongst the soldiers of the palace, never once going down to his house. Why so detained we know not. There is no reason given; but it may be surmised that David was hesitating during this interval, the voice of conscience striving within him against the forces of evil that were hurrying him on to the abyss. And knowing of David what we do, can we avoid breathing out a longing desire that the voice of conscience might have prevailed. Surely he has gone far enough; has descended low enough; has been suffered to do evil enough. Are the fires of temptation to burn up everything of goodness and nobility in his character? Will not the God he has served so faithfully intervene at this stage and rescue him from that

roaring lion, the Devil, even as he had rescued him, when a youth from *the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear*? These had only threatened his earthly life, but now what is threatened is infinitely more important, viz., his soul, his character, his reputation with his subjects, and, more than all, the honor of the God he worshipped, and who had so conspicuously brought him out and defended him in times past.

If one can picture the great judge and ruler of all souls sitting as a *refiner and purifier of silver*, as the latest prophet pictures him (Mal. iii. 3), and permitting his chosen servant to be subjected to such a fierce and dreadful fire of temptation as has overwhelmed him so far, could any good man refrain from imploring the Lord of Souls to stay the fire at this stage, and deliver his servant from utter destruction?

That, certainly, would be a very natural impulse.

But, again, we are compelled to be silent, to *put our hand upon our mouth*, and to say, with all submission, *God is wiser than man!* He surely has some unusually great purpose in permitting such a "strange work" as this—permitting Satan to have such terrible power over the soul of his servant as this. Is not the Lord, to speak after the manner of men, erecting a great beacon light on the dangerous shores of life and time, and does he not know how high that beacon should be, and to what extent the light of warning should stream over the rocks and shoals that beset the path of men? Is not the path of danger different to different men, so that what is a temptation to one man has no charm for another? It is even so. And thus it came about, and we may say it with reverence and awe, that the fire of temptation was permitted to burn on, and to become hotter and hotter. The Devil was permitted to have still more power; and to draw this servant of God still further aside than before, but in a different direction. It was adultery before. Now it is murder. He who can say to the tides of evil in the soul, as well as to the tides of the ocean, Thus far, and no farther, was pleased, in the depths of a wisdom that is "*past finding out*," to allow the devouring tide to sweep on. The beacon was not yet built high enough. If the master builder stays

the process here, many drifting souls may never be reached by the light.*

The method adopted by the King to bring about Uriah's destruction was, as has been said, instinct with Satanic cunning. During this period of his life, David was as much "possessed of the Devil" as Judas was after Satan *had entered into him*. (John xiii. 27.)

The army, with Joab as commander, was besieging a city of Ammon. David sent Uriah back to his post, bearing a letter to Joab, which was practically a death-warrant. *Set ye Uriah in the forefront of the hottest battle, and retire ye from him that he may be smitten and die.* Thus ran the King's command, with the former part of which no fault can be found, for in a siege the forefront of the hottest battle is the place of honor, and none but the bravest men are appointed to it. But the further direction, *to retire from him*,* to abandon him to the fury of defenders, is in a very strict and literal sense a diabolical command. It would ensure his death. Yet it might be made to appear part of the stress of a hot episode in the battle; it might appear, indeed, as if it were Uriah's own fault in pressing on too rashly, as men are apt to do in the heat of a fierce contest. So none would dream of blaming the King. If anybody was blamed, it would be Joab, the commander of the attacking force, but blame would sit very lightly on him, for he could only be supposed to have made one of those mistakes which the most skilful captains do at times. So then this loyal, faithful and brave man perished as a consequence of the indulgence in lustful and unlawful desire on the part of the King, who now had upon him the double-dyed iniquity of adultery and murder.

Joab himself was indeed highly blamable, for he well knew the purport of the King's message. Had it been a command to slay Uriah in cold blood it could not have carried a plainer intent. *Set him in the forefront of the battle*, said the King, not that he may lead the storming party, and

*That the figure here employed is right and reasonable, none can doubt who are acquainted with Divine revelation and human character.

have the honor of capturing the city, but, specifically, that he may be *smitten and die*.

Joab, in fact, was as guilty as the King in the matter of Uriah's death, for he was well able, when he chose, to take his own course in opposition to the wishes of the King. Of that David had complained on the occasion of the murder of Abner. These two brothers, Joab and Abishai, said the King, *are too strong for me*. Joab then, on receiving the order to place Uriah where he was certain to be killed, ought to have refused. Even a simple regard for one of his best and bravest soldiers would have led to this. But Joab, we know, was one of those soldiers who are absolutely indifferent to bloodshed, and moral considerations had little or no weight with him. That Joab perfectly understood the intent of the message is manifest from the word he sent to the King about the siege:—"If the King complains," said he, "that the lives of his soldiers were needlessly risked in the assault, tell him this, *Thy servant Uriah the Hittite is dead also*." (v. 21.)

When this message was delivered, the King added hypocrisy to his other sin by sending a reply to Joab, telling him not to be grieved for the death of Uriah, *for the word devoureth one as well as the other*, and to press on the siege more strongly.

Thus has David sunk down into the horrible pit of adultery, murder and hypocrisy, and one may wonder that even the superabounding mercy of God could rescue one who knew so well, who had experienced so much, yet who had sinned so shamefully against light and knowledge and conscience.

After recounting all this, the narrative adds—*But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord*. (v. 27.) One cannot but be struck by the mildness of such a sentence, in view of the enormity of the guilt. But we shall soon find that the Divine view of David's guilt is to be learned from the tremendous *punishments* that overtook him—punishment, let us bear in mind, which came upon him *after* his deep repentance and bitter acknowledgment of wrong. For it is often the law of the Divine procedure with his servants, that for their wrong doing they shall be severely chastised in the present life, though their souls are delivered from the wrath to come.

NOTES TO CHAPTER VIII.

I.—AS TO THE NUDE IN ART.

The lesson of David's fall cannot be properly appreciated unless we consider the origin of it. How came he to fall at all—that is, to fall in contradistinction to a mere momentary stumbling?

The narrative we have been studying makes it plain. The King, walking on the roof of his house, sees, through an open casement, *a woman washing herself*, that is, a woman in her bath, and *the woman was very beautiful to look upon*. That the King continued looking is evident, and that the looking kindled the flame of evil desire is evident also. It was not the looking upon a beautiful woman as she would be when walking the street, or dressed for some of the festivals, say, for the Feast of Tabernacles, when doubtless both men and women put on gay attire; but the looking upon her in that specific nude condition. He saw a woman washing herself, and there can be no doubt that such a sight would be a dangerous one to any man, and what it did for David is only too plainly told. The sight at first was no doubt accidental. But it was fascinating. It drew the looker on, as the fabled basilisk was said to draw on the onlooker. And the look being continued under the fascinating power waked up dormant passion, until virtue was overmastered and Satan fully entered into his soul.

The ancients fully understood the danger of such looking, as we see from the striking story of Ulysses and the Sirens, in Homer's *Odyssey*.

Ulysses, the wise, so fully understood it, that he is represented as requiring himself to be bound until the Island of the Sirens was passed. This he did in the coolness of matured wisdom, knowing how dangerous the sight was.—And how terribly dangerous it was, is shown by what happened. For, when the island was approached, and the Sirens appeared on the shore, the virtue of Ulysses gave way, the fires of passion were kindled, he became restless, and at last exerted all his

strength to burst the bonds that restrained him. Had he succeeded, he would have been added to the number of the Sirens' victims : for the story is that they all perished, their bones bleaching the shore of the fatal island. Yes, the Ancients knew. They knew, as we learn from their own writings, and as we are told by the Apostle Paul in writing to the Romans. (Romans i. and ii.)

Now as to this particular incident in the life of the King, it is extremely unlikely that anything of the kind may transpire in the ordinary average of men's experience in the present day. But there is something, in the developments of modern life, that so closely resembles it, as to be fraught with the same danger,—to be instinct with the same fascinating temptation. And it is this.

With the renaissance of literature some centuries ago, there was, as is well known, a renaissance in art. The renaissance of literature brought out prominently the treasures of Greek and Roman poetry. Steeped as it is in idolatrous conceptions and ideas, it is yet so fascinating by its genius and beauty that the painters of the time, whose art, for many ages had been mainly confined within the lines of ecclesiastical subjects, were now drawn to embody these heathen conceptions in their works. And thus it came about that pictures of the heathen gods and goddesses and of subordinate deities, nymphs, fawns and satyrs, appeared in the world of art ; and amongst them, naturally, were found pictures of that goddess Venus, who was the embodiment of the idea, not of beauty only, but of sensuous love. Most of these pictures remain to this day.

For some time after the period of the great Italian painters, this particular development of art was not much fostered. But during the last generation there has been a recrudescence of it, and a school has arisen, in modern art, who make it their chief business to paint pictures representing, in infinite variety, just such a scene as David looked upon from his palace, or as Ulysses is fabled to have looked upon in the deadly island of the Sirens. These pictures are to be found in nearly all modern galleries, and have been, as is well known, multiplied by engravings and photographs. Need-

less to say, that as works of art, many of them are of the highest excellence.

Now, there can be no doubt,—and a most serious thing it is to say, that a picture of this kind is calculated to produce precisely the same effect as the sight of the reality did upon the King of Israel ; or as the sight of the Sirens did upon Ulysses. And it is obvious that the more life-like the picture, the more certain is the influence to radiate from it. What that influence is, the story of David, and of many others who have fallen like him, tells only too plainly. That such pictures, therefore, are dangerous, no one that knows human nature would dispute. And the very art of the painter in pictures of every description, is so to stimulate reality that whatever impression reality would make, the picture will make. If, in this special case, the reality would kindle the fire of evil passion, so will the picture. And if a wise man would pray: *Lead me not into the actual temptation* that caused the fall of David,—he can also pray “Lead me not into the same temptation in another form ;” and also pray for grace to *turn away the eye* from beholding what it is dangerous to look upon.

It is sometimes objected to this strain of remark that Scripture itself declares that “*to the pure all things are pure,*” which is perfectly true. And if the world were composed of people who were so pure that nothing they could either see or hear would be a temptation to them,—then it would not matter what men looked at. But where is the community of which this can be said ? Where is the community in which the large majority are not susceptible of temptation in a greater or lesser degree. The text, therefore, can have no practical application to the subject while the world is as it is. And the conclusion to which a calm consideration of the matter will inevitably lead us is that such pictures should neither be painted, nor exhibited, nor looked at.

II.—AS TO THE COMPARISON BETWEEN THE FALL OF DAVID AND THE FALL OF PETER.

This lamentable chapter of Old Testament history, has its counterpart in the New. And if the terrible fall and sin of David are pregnant with lessons in one direction, that of Peter has, in a very eminent degree, in another.

David fell by a lustful look, Peter by rash self-confidence. Both fell suddenly, and it is hard to say which of the two was most to blame. Both of these men abused high and extraordinary privileges, sinning against light, and opportunity, and great advantage for continuing in a righteous path, and of resisting temptation, if temptation came. For if David had been called out to compose devout psalms, under Divine inspiration, Peter had been, for nearly three years, in close company with the Son of God, hearing, not only his public addresses, but those more weighty conversations of a private sort, given to them *who knew the mystery of the Kingdom*.

CHAPTER IX.

DAVID'S AWAKENING AND REPENTANCE.

(2 Samuel, Chapter 12.)

The high, and indeed, immeasurable superiority in the moral tone of the religion of the Hebrews over that of the ancient heathen nations, is strikingly shown in what transpired after David's great fall. For that fall was followed, first by the Divine Lord sending a prophet, with a message of sharp remonstrance and awakening ; then, by a deep and profound repentance on the part of the offender ; and, after that, by the infliction of such a severe and long-continued punishment as has rarely been inflicted upon any man whatsoever, in any time or age.

Certain modern critics are fond of representing the Hebrew conception of God, in those times, as differing but little from the gods of the surrounding nations.

But now, in all fairness, let us consider : can we possibly conceive of Moloch or Baal being *highly displeased* with one of their chief votaries because he had been guilty of adultery and murder ? Was there amongst these gods such a moral consciousness (to speak of them as real beings) as would lead them to reprobate what David had done ; to send a prophet to remonstrate with him, and to inflict, only if they had the power, severe punishment for the crime. We may, indeed, even extend the question, and ask : could we conceive of the gods of the Greeks and Romans doing this ?

To ask this question is to answer it. Such reprobation,—such moral consciousness, on the part of Moloch and Baal, could not be conceived possible. For they were never conceived of as gods of righteousness and truth, *loving right-*

eousness, and *hating* iniquity. They were largely conceived of, and so were the chief gods of Greece and Rome, as beings of superior *power*. But being such, as regarded their power, they were invariably conceived of as having like passions and vices with men. To conceive of Moloch reprobating murder, or Baal being displeased with adultery, or Jupiter with either, is an absurdity. That is—the heathen represented their gods to be, in morals, what they were themselves.

Therefore, any heathen potentate, any Syrian, or Babylonish king, or any of the kings of Philistia or Moab who did what David did,—(and such deeds were common enough amongst them), was never called on to repent in dust and ashes for what he had done.

Where is there an instance, in all ancient secular history, of any king being called on to repent of such sins! The idea is inconceivable. No heathen man's conscience troubled him for adultery as a moral offence. He might be troubled with the fear of wrath from the outraged *husband*. But to fear the wrath of his gods! This idea is unthinkable.*

But, as we have read, the God whom David worshipped, and whom we and all Christian people worship,—the God of the law of righteousness, was *displeased* at what David had done. How much displeased,—as has been said,—we may learn by his punishment.

For a considerable time David was left alone. There is, during this period, no sign whatever of any spiritual awakening, though (and this is the best thing that can be said of him during this wretched episode of his life)—he had made the best reparation he could to the unfortunate woman whom he had wronged, by making her his wife. So, then, the

*The same remark may be extended to subsequent times. What Greek, what heathen Roman, even of the time of the Empire previous to Constantine ever feared the reproaches of his priest, or the warning of a prophet, if he had indulged his passions as David did? We may indeed ask, What follower of Mohammed had such a fear?

The truth is that it has ever been from Divine revelation alone that men have had such a sense of wrong-doing as would constrain them to repent of sin, and turn from it to the Supreme Ruler of conduct seeking forgiveness and power to rule themselves righteously in future.

child she bore was born in the king's house, and received all the care which a king's child could receive.

But David himself remained insensible. And he might, humanly speaking, have so remained, and have gone on to the day of his death with all his guilt upon his head.

But there were higher than human influences at work concerning him. Wandering as he was like a lost sheep, the great Shepherd, of whom he had sung in better days, in strains of inimitable pathos,—looked upon him in compassion. And, as the Divine teacher spake, long afterwards, of the "*lost sheep*," when the shepherd *sought out*, leaving the ninety and nine in the fold,—so now, the Shepherd of whom he had sung, sought out *him*. For the narrative herein is noticeable. It is not that the King awoke, and turned to the Lord; but that the Lord sent a messenger after him. And, truly, if there were nothing but bare justice at work, David might justly have been left to his fate. God might well have said, the sin of this man is too scandalous; it has given too much occasion to the enemy to blaspheme. Let him die. Even so might the Lord Jesus have said of Peter. In any other disciple such conduct might be forgiven. But in Peter! Peter, the most prominent, the best known, the most courageous;—his guilt is unpardonable! . . . That would be after the manner of men, but it was not the manner of the Divine Saviour. Even while in the very act of cursing and swearing, *denying the Master that bought him; the Lord turned and looked upon Peter!* And power went out with the look; the power of salvation.

And thus it was with the King of Israel. The prophet Nathan was sent; a true prophet, indeed: not one of the sort who flatter kings for their own benefit, and always prophecy smooth things. He was one, who like some who came after, like Jeremiah and Ezekiel and Daniel, would speak the word of the Lord, whether the King would hear, or whether he would forbear. But at this time he had a message to deliver which required all the boldness that ever prophet possessed. For saying less than Nathan was commissioned to say, many a prophet has been imprisoned or slain.

There was, we may notice, extraordinary tact, indeed, there was a wisdom inspired from above, in the way he deliv-

ered his message. He told a story of great simplicity and beauty. We see before us the poor man, with *one little ewe lamb*;—a pet lamb, loved by *the children* of the house, *eating of his own meat, drinking of his own cup, cherished on his own bosom*, and being to him *as a daughter*! An exquisite picture, indeed.

And then the contrast: a *rich man*,—having *exceeding many flocks and herds*;—abundance,—superabundance,—about him; but wanting a lamb for entertaining a guest, he has the heartlessness to pass by and spare his own flocks, and to rob the poor man of his one solitary *pet lamb*. This was the story.

A man would be less than human who did not blaze out with indignation at such an outrageous deed. And David, however he might have allowed evil passions to master him, and make him so long insensible to his own position in the sight of God, had still about him those powerful instincts of generosity which were natural to his character. For thus it may be even with a man who has backslidden from God and holiness. David then, as was natural to any man with a spark of humanity in him, did blaze out with indignation against this rich spoiler. “He took what was equivalent to a most solemn oath; *as the Lord liveth, the man that hath done this thing shall surely die!*” Then, probably, after considering for a moment, he added, *and he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity!*

Well spoken.—Well conceived,—thou King of Israel! This is worthy of thy best days of generosity and goodness;—and probably, thou art enquiring next from the prophet who this villain was, and where he lived, that thy swift justice may overtake him.

But let us conceive, if we can conceive,—the astonishment of the King when the prophet, speaking in the name of God, utters the terrible words—**THOU ART THE MAN!**

If a shot from his own sling had struck him in the forehead David could hardly have been more stunned:—Is it possible? And now the searchlight of God’s word by the mouth of the prophet begins to perform its office. The word

is quick and powerful in operation; it is sharper than that two-edged sword of Goliath; it divides asunder the very soul and spirit of the man; it discerns the thoughts and intents of his heart. It discovers himself to himself; and there he sees himself as with a lightning flash, to be the rich and powerful robber of the domestic peace of his poor faithful soldier; robbing him of the dear and cherished wife who lay in his bosom, ate of his meat, drank of his cup, and was to him more than a daughter; and then, all at once, there must have flashed upon him, even as Banquo's ghost before the guilty Scottish king, the image of the husband whom he had murdered!

This, doubtless, would flash through the king's mind—quickly, powerfully, (even as it is said that when a man is drowning the events of a life pass in most rapid consciousness) for, let us remember, it was the Lord that sent the prophet and gave him his message. And the Lord, the Spirit, was working with the message, as He surely purposed that He would when the prophet was sent, working as a spirit of conviction of sin. And all who know of the operation of spiritual forces in the soul of man know that this is one of the mightiest forces of them all. For it is often a veritable earthquake of the soul.

Thus when the sword of the spirit struck the king in the crushing words, *Thou art the man*, it is hardly needed that the prophet should amplify the matter. But God saw fit that he should so amplify that the king's conscience might be plainly directed. And besides, the prophet was commissioned to announce his punishment. For repentance toward God could not obviate the necessity of a divine judgment being openly exercised before all David's subjects; and not his subjects only, but for the warning of all, who to the very end of time, should hear of his scandalous sin, and this last has been shown to be needful by experience. Even in these modern times, the sin of David has often been cast up as a reproach against God and His people by men who have observed the sin *but have ignored the punishment*.

The prophet therefore went on to say (v. 7):—

"THUS SAITH THE LORD GOD OF ISRAEL, *I anointed thee*

king over Israel, and I delivered thee out of the hand of Saul and I gave thee thy master's house and thy master's wives into thy bosom, and gave thee the house of Israel and of Judah, (and, the prophet added, God might have given him more.) Wherefore hast thou then despised the commandment of the Lord to do evil in His sight? Thou hast killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword (mark how this, the most heinous sin, is placed first and is repeated) and hast taken his wife to be thy wife and hast slain him with the sword of the children of Ammon.—(v. 7, 8, 9.)

Alas! alas! Every word was true. And every word must have been like the turning about of a sword in the very vitals of the listening king: *He hath made my mouth like a sharp sword,*" said the prophet Isaiah; (Chap. XLIX.) speaking of the Son of David: and truly the sword needed to be very sharp to deal with a case like this; and not the sword of conviction only, but the sword of judgment and retribution.

For the prophet now announces, as a judge pronouncing sentence, what the punishment is to be: *"Now therefore the sword shall never depart from thine house because thou hast despised me and hast taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be thy wife."*

This is the first count of the sentence; and it opens up a vista of calamity such as probably, taken altogether, few men have ever been visited with. The punishment corresponded with the sin. The king's sword had slain his loyal and devoted servant. By the sword of a disloyal son of his own house was he to be driven from his kingdom; and that son, aided and abetted by the disloyal and treacherous adhesion of a trusted councillor. Thus one of the very darkest chapters in all history would have to be written concerning a son of his own house, the shame of which would be reflected back on himself. For, through that son the second portion of his punishment would also proceed; which like the other would correspond only too bitterly with the sin. Murder was to be punished with the sword; adultery and dishonor by adultery and dishonor.

For thus saith the Lord, Behold I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house, and I will take thy wives before thine eyes, and give them unto thy neighbor, and he shall lie

with thy wives in the sight of this sun. For thou didst it secretly; but I will do this thing before all Israel and before the sun. (v. 11, 12.)

A horrible doom truly, to be dishonored in that very particular that all men hold most sacred; and to be dishonored shamefully and publicly before all Israel. A dreadful Nemesis! Yet the universal instinct of mankind will pronounce the sentence just. The greater the knowledge, the deeper the sin.

And let us mark that this dreadful threat, when carried out would be a punishment for another sin, hitherto passed by, viz., for having flagrantly transgressed the law by *multiplying wives unto himself*. (Deut. XVII 17.) And this illustrates another feature of the Divine government, viz., that wrong doing, even of a flagrant character, may be allowed to develop and go on unpunished for a long period, and this even when there is a Divine intention to punish at a future day, which punishment generally follows upon some other transgression and is accentuated by it.

But this story of David's transgression is also a striking illustration of the demoralizing tendency of polygamy, and of the extraordinary folly of the men who have revived its practice in these days, taking Old Testament instances of it as examples and encouragements instead of deterrents and warnings as they clearly are when the whole of each narrative is fairly considered.

The last stroke of the punishment seems comparatively light; the child that was born to Bathsheba *should surely die*. This also fitted the offence, for our instinctive feeling is that it were better that a child so born should not live. The death of a child, however, though always a source of sorrow, especially to the mother, is the common lot of married life. And we can scarcely understand the extreme bitterness of David's sorrow unless we connect with it a sense of Divine retribution for his sin.

When, then, the child lay sick, and, as the narrative says, it was very sick; every pang of pain, every cry, every gasp of the poor little sufferer, would be like an arrow rankling in David's very heart. For he could not but think, as he

watched the child tossing on his little bed of pain,—all this is from my misdoing. I have brought on this innocent one these agonies of pain. For we must understand that his conscience had now become as highly sensitive as it had before been obdurate and hard. During the week of that sickness he would doubtless endure the concentrated misery of a life time. For when the sickness came on, he prayed, *he fasted*, and with such a depth of humiliation, that *he lay all night upon the earth! All night upon the earth!* And we can imagine that in the solitary hours of that awful night, when the *terrors of the Almighty* were upon him, the thoughts arose which were afterwards embodied in that profoundly touching fifty first psalm.

Thus passed the week; a week of such agony that his servants feared to speak to him of the phases of the sickness. Still more did they fear to speak when the child died. For the king was lying prostrate *upon the earth* at that very time.

But the death of the child was the end of the king's agony. Strange, thought the servants, that the king can now arise and anoint himself, changing his apparel (which apparently he had not done for a week) and coming to the House of God. But it is evident that the death of the child was viewed by the king as the consummation of that portion of his punishment. The sword was withdrawn for the present and he felt like a prisoner released.

But one pathetic touch remains to be noticed. The king answered his servants, on their expressing surprise,—*While the child was alive I fasted and wept; for I said, who can tell if God will be gracious to me that the child may live.* But now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? *Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me!* (v. 23.)

Here is another of those indications of the future life in the Old Testament which appear here and there, and which shine and nowhere more clearly than in the Psalms. *I SHALL GO TO HIM.* Even so. The child lives, though, in another sphere. And my death will not be the end of life to me. For I too shall then be living and I shall rejoin my lost child.

CHAPTER X.

THE SWORD IN THE HOUSE OF DAVID.

(2 Samuel XIII.)

The Divine judgment is sometimes slow in its operation in this life, perhaps more frequently slow than not; but there is judgment in this life undoubtedly, especially on those, who, like David, have been raised to a high position and still more, who have had eminent gifts and remarkable grace bestowed upon them, as he had, in addition. One of the things threatened by the mouth of the prophet Nathan had come to pass already; the child born of Bathsheba was dead. We are now to mark the sorrowful development of the first threatened punishment in the rise and progress of trouble severe and long continued, in his own house. This trouble was characterized by almost every feature of wickedness that has darkened human records. There was lust, and rapc, and incest; there was treachery and murder; there was conspiracy, and rebellion, and usurpation of the throne, all within the house of David itself; and there was as a consequence of rebellion, civil war in the land. A dismal catalogue of evils indeed.

Now it is noticeable, how, quite apart from special Divine judgment, the root of nearly all this trouble was in the practice of polygamy. Allowed by all heathen systems, and by Mohammedanism almost without restriction in practice, allowed with severe restriction in the law of Moses (for only two wives could be taken under it by any man, however rich), sternly repressed by that very law in the case of kings desiring to *multiply wives*, as was the common practice with monarchs, it was finally abolished in the Christian dispensation by our Lord Himself.

And what are the lessons of the Old Testament respecting it? What were clearly its consequences? To Abraham,

discord and quarrels in his household; to Jacob a family, with one exception and until affliction changed them, of violent, lawless, and treacherous sons; to Solomon a development of incredible folly in the turning away of his heart after other gods, and here in the case of David we have the dismal record of sons by different mothers treating one another as utter aliens, a son by one mother indulging unlawful passion towards a daughter by another, and finally using violence towards her; then in revenge for this a treacherous plot by one brother to murder the rest, all which shows an utter absence of that parental influence and control which can only be carried out when both father and mother agree in carrying it out. All which shows the extraordinary folly of men and women in this Christian dispensation, who, being brought up in the Christian faith, deliberately forsake it; and institute a semi-Mohammedan system like Mormonism and make polygamy a leading feature of religion, investing, with a terrible profanity, the taking of many wives, with a religious sanction. And this in imitation, as they foolishly think, *miserabile dictu*, of the men of the Old Testament, as if, in this particular, their lives were examples, and not warnings! And others, once Christians, are now attracted by Mohammedanism, of all things; and by Buddhism! Truly, human nature, in some persons, and these, too, of an enlightened sort, appears as a bundle of absurdities and contradictions, and strange as some, even of the non-miraculous occurrences of the biographies of the Old Testament may appear, we may well receive them in view of equally strange developments in our own times.

The beginning of strife, said the wise Solomon, is *as when one letteth out water*, the idea being that of the foolish undermining of a dam and the letting loose of devouring waters. Some little word, which being spoken can never be recalled, goes on, being bandied back and forth with increasing violence, finally issuing in the blow, the assault, the murder.

The beginning of the strife that culminated in Absalom's rebellion was the wicked passion of Ammon, David's eldest son, for his half sister, the story being instinct with a preg-

nant moral for young men, warning them to what lengths unlawful desire will carry them unless stopped at the very outset. Ammon's passion for Tamar, his consulting with a crafty councillor how to gratify it, the scheming to get her in his power, and the violence he exercised towards her; then the revulsion of his feeling afterwards,, for he now *hated her exceedingly, so that the hatred whereunto he hated her was greater than the love whereunto he had loved her;* (v. 15) his brutal treatment of her in consequence; ("*put out this woman,*" he said, "*and bolt the door after her.*") all this, alas, is too true to life and human nature in such circumstances. Many a great household in ancient times, and many in Mohammedan countries has seen the like. Given polygamy as the rule of the house, all else follows. And the stronger the character of the men, the more terrible the developments of evil. Ammon and Absalom both, had they been well brought up by a wise and judicious mother, with the restraining hand of a governing father, might have become the support of the throne, the leaders of the people, wise sub-administrators, taking part with their father and his councillors in carrying on the affairs of government. As it was they became the plague of the kingdom. Ammon, permitted to grow up in unrestrained self-indulgence, dishonors and maltreats his half sister, and rouses up the wrath of Absalom, his half brother, who naturally bitterly resents the wrong done to his own sister, and determines to take a bitter revenge for it.

The mother of Absalom, let us bear in mind, was an Ishmaelite — a daughter of the King of Geshur, the Geshurites, (chap. iii., 3), being of kindred with the Amalekites, and (1 Sam. xxvii., 8), inhabiting the same desert region south of Palestine, "*as thou goest to Shur even to the land of Egypt.*" And if we come to wonder how it came about that David should marry the daughter of an Ishmaelite chief, we will probably find the reason for it in that expedition against these tribes of the desert recorded in the chapter quoted above. For though it is stated that every man and woman that his soldiers found was slain, it is very possible that the chief with his

family might have escaped, and afterwards tendered submission. Thus the way would be opened for David to take the daughter to wife. And herein, again, is matter for reflection on events and their consequences. This daughter of Ishmael was probably a very beautiful woman (certainly her son Absalom was), and it is to be noted that David before marrying her, already had the two wives allowed by the Mosaic law. Her beauty, however, tempted him; he yielded to the temptation, and married her, this being David's first marked transgression against the law, and opening the way to other transgressions of the same kind, until the frightful catastrophe of adultery and murder transpired of which the consequences are now developing. This marriage transgressed the law in another way, equally flagrant; for the woman was of the idolatrous nation with whom marriage was forbidden. And in this very particular David went on transgressing, for as we have seen, after capturing Jerusalem, he took wives from the Jebusites, its old Canaanitish inhabitants.

All this is true to life and experience as we now know it. Sin leads to sin, for the beginning of wrong-doing as well as of strife, is as the letting out of water. One wrong leads on to another, until the habit of wrong-doing is formed. And not only is this the course of wrong-doing in general, but it is true of particular sins. The yielding to temptation, for example, in the case of intoxicating drink, or of lying, or of covetousness, or licentiousness, is a sort of opening the door to the commission of the same sin again, until in time men may come to do callously things of which the mere contemplation at one time, would have made them start back with horror. Had some prophet, in David's early life, drawn a picture of him as dishonoring a married woman, and then murdering her husband, he would doubtless have started back as a certain Syrian chief did in after days, and exclaimed, What! *Is thy servant a dog, that he should do this thing.* (2 Kings VIII. 13.) Yet it all came about; and now we have to follow with grief and a certain awe, the course of retribution.

Absalom then, had in him Ishmaelitish blood. And it

comes out in the treacherous and murderous deeds he planned and carried out, first in revenge for his sister's dishonor and then in revenge for the slight put upon him by his father in refusing to see him on his return.

After such a deed as that perpetrated by Ammon we would expect that the perpetrator would be dealt with in the course of justice, king's son though he was. But we read of no action of David as magistrate or judge. He was *very wroth* when he heard of the dishonor of his daughter; and we may gather inferentially that Ammon was banished from the court for two years. This action, however, was rather as the head of the household than as a judge; for to have had Ammon, Absalom and Tamar in the same household would have been utterly intolerable, at any rate until it might be supposed that time had worked its usual healing result.

But the wrath of a man like Absalom may slumber; yet, in the absence of him who has caused it, and also, in the absence of any Divine influence tending to the forgiveness of injury, such as there was with his father towards Saul—it will only wait opportunity for vengeance. Two years elapse. Ammon possibly thought that by this time his villanous deed had been forgotten. But not so Absalom. His Ishmaelitish blood, that evil strain of heredity which never ought to have been introduced into the family of David at all, rises up when Ammon once more appears and mingles with the family; and now the punishment for David's sins (the sword in his own house) develops in a treacherous plot of one of his sons to murder the other. And let us again mark how the punishment fits the crime. David had caused Uriah to be murdered under pretence of assigning him the post of honor in the battle. Absalom plots to murder his brother under pretence of kindness and hospitality, as if he had forgiven him. A villanous act of treachery, indeed, for in that day, as in this, and specially amongst the descendants of Ishmael, to "eat a man's salt," as the technical phrase is, cancels all wrongs, and is the seal of friendliness and good will. But thus it was. At the festival of sheep-shearing, to which Ammon was invited, and to which he went, suspecting nothing, while *his heart was merry with wine*, the servants of Ab-

salom in obedience to their master's orders *smote Ammon* till he died. Thus was the dishonor of the sister avenged, not in the solemn and orderly course of justice, but by that deadly private vengeance which leads often to a fouler crime than the one avenged. This was the first stroke of that *sword which was never to depart from David's house*; a light stroke indeed, however, compared with the calamities which were to supervene. For as has been already said, the punishment was far heavier than might have been inflicted upon ordinary mortals, in that David, by Divine Providence, was raised so far above ordinary men, both in station, in intellectual powers, and in the large bestowment of spiritual gifts. For it is certainly a law of Divine procedure and it commends itself to our calm judgment, that the quality and heinousness of a man's sin shall be reckoned in proportion to his knowledge and opportunity. It is so even in human jurisprudence, imperfect as it is, much more than in the accurate apportionment of punishment by the All-wise Judge who knows the very *thoughts and intents of the heart*.

All David's sons had been invited to the banquet, and all were there. But when the sword was drawn and their brother murdered in the very midst of the merriment, they naturally rose and fled. A false report was swiftly carried to the king (how constant is human nature and human life in this respect) that the murder included *all his sons*, at which he was stunned and heart-broken. But the young men themselves soon made their appearance, *lifting up their voices and weeping; and the king also and his servants wept very sore*. And indeed, we must sympathise with the bitter grief of such a man as David when such terrible developments took place in his family. Bad as Ammon had been he was David's first born son. And how true to human experience is the narrative that David *mourned for his son every day*, the bitterest ingredient in his sorrow being that his own wrong-doing had been the primary occasion of it. But this was only *the beginning of sorrows*.

As for Absalom, it was impossible for him to return home, or that he could remain in the country at all. A true instinct of self-preservation bade him fly, and naturally he

found refuge with the family of his mother, amongst the Ishmaelitish tribe of Geshur, of which his grandfather Talmai, was chief. There he remained three years.

But let us mark the progress of events as they are being overruled by the Almighty Ruler for the accomplishment of retribution. Absalom was away, banished—and evidently his brothers, and the mother and connections of Ammon were cherishing purposes of vengeance against him should he ever dare to show himself in Jerusalem. Yet Absalom—the handsomest man in the land, (chap. 35) a man, too, of bold and daring character, was exacting as one as wise a father's affection in these days. And the story of Absalom's crime, flight, and return has been related in many a great family in modern times. The king's heart, as time wore on, went out towards Absalom; he longed to go forth to him; a most true picture, and instinct with knowledge of human nature. But the longing and the desire was one thing; (it was the welling up of desire in the father;) but the action of the king was a different and much more serious matter. Yet it was brought about that he should consent to Absalom's return, in a manner most unlikely and almost inconceivable, viz., through the intervention of the hard and unscrupulous Joab. That he, of all men, should trouble himself about it, is one of those curious instances of inconsistency in human character that is as hard to account for as it is constantly met with. For it certainly was not his interest but much the contrary that such a man as Absalom should return.

But he did so trouble himself, and he went about somewhat in the manner in which Nathan the prophet had done some time before, viz., by rousing the king's feelings through the medium of a story bearing some resemblance to the case of the king and Absalom. One who is called a wise woman, probably one who claimed some gift of prophecy, lawfully or otherwise, was persuaded by the crafty general to appear before the king and personate a widow whose sons had quarrelled, one having killed the other, exactly as Absalom had killed Ammon. The family, she said, had risen up against her, insisting that the slayer should be put to

death. But she begged the king to protect him, as he was her only son, and if he were slain, too, the *fire of her house would be entirely put out* (how significant the figure) and nothing left to her husband's name upon the earth.

The king's attention is gained, and being touched he promises to see about the matter. But this obviously is not enough. She pleads further,—and so effectually, that the king promises to protect both herself and her son.

Now then, having gained this much, having induced the king to *affirm the principle* of protection in the case (as we in modern times would call it,) she proceeds with singular adroitness and skill, very cautiously, and insinuatingly, to bring in the similar case of the king's own son, who is banished and dare not return.

But now the king begins to suspect. There must be some design in this story he thinks, and following up this train of reflection, he concludes that Joab has had something to do with it. The king said to the woman, (v. 19,) *Is not the hand of Joab with thee in all this?* This plain question brings out the truth; for it would have been madness to equivocate, and she replies, *Thy servant Joab, he bade me, and he put all these words in the mouth of thine handmaid!*

The king, doubtless with a desire to please one who could do so much to help or to hinder in his kingdom as the chief captain of his army, gives his consent to Absalom's return to the country. But not to David's house. That would be a sure occasion of quarrel, for the mother of the murdered Ammon was there, and also the other sons of David, who were (possibly) so near being murdered too. Alas! for a king and a father who had such elements to deal with in his own house. No! It was impossible for Absalom to show himself there. The king refused to see him,—very naturally and prudently. Absalom, therefore, goes to his own house, the very house in Mount Ephraim where the banquet and the murder took place.

An evil day for the king was this of Absalom's return, and fraught with unimaginable calamity for himself and his kingdom. But this was the course of the Nemesis that was dogging his steps.

CHAPTER XI.

ABSALON'S REBELLION.

(2 Samuel: 15 to 18.)

In previous chapters we have unfolded to us step by step, leaf by leaf, as it were, the progress of that Nemesis of retribution which had been threatened by the prophet who was charged with a message from God to the guilty king. Hitherto the retribution had been confined to David's own house. Troubles, sharp and sore indeed, as sore as any father was ever afflicted with, had developed one after another, as his sons broke out in deeds of wickedness, and as these arose one after another, we can understand those heart-breaking outcries, those bitter and sorrowful wails of misery which occur so frequently in the Psalms. Many a *De Profundis* calls out to us there; *out of the depths* of a distracted soul; many a cry of *save me for the waters have come into my soul; I sink in deep mire where there is no standing!* And, bitterest of all, that mournful wail of agony which expressed the consummation of atoning suffering by our Blessed Lord and Saviour, My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me, was first uttered by his ancestor, David, in some time of misery such as that occasioned by these terrible family troubles. Yet God bringeth light out of darkness, and out of evil educes good. So, in the deep working of His wonderful Providence and grace, he has caused to be recorded expressions of agonizing grief, that others, passing through their times of sorrow, may take comfort by the power of sympathetic feeling. For where is there a family over which trouble has not cast its shadow? Disobedience and even open rebellion, sickness, death, estrangement, banishment,—are not these, one or other of them, the common lot in families, and probably oftener in families of high estate than in those of low degree! It is certainly so.

But now the operation of judgment is to be spread over a far wider area. Hitherto it has touched David in his family relations alone; now it is to spread its deadly influence over the whole kingdom. For this daring and ambitious son, Absalom, is now to attempt to seize the throne.

Previously, however, to making this attempt, it was necessary that he should be able to show himself in Jerusalem, and the manner in which he brings this about reflects his cunning and unscrupulous character. Joab is again sought to be made use of. But Joab is cautious. He thinks, probably, he has done enough, perhaps too much already, in bringing Absalom back to the country. He therefore firmly refuses to see him. (Chap. XIV. 29.) Then Absalom resorts to a curious stratagem. Joab had a farm near to Absalom's. On this farm he was growing barley, and the crop was ripening. *See,* said Absalom to his servants, *go and set that barley on fire,* well knowing that Joab would come to him and demand the reason. Then he would have his opportunity. The rashness of his character, the want of consideration of consequences is conspicuous in this action; for he ran the greatest possible risk of reprisals from the powerful captain, and of making him an enemy for life.

However, the stratagem answered its purpose. Joab came and naturally showed indignation. *Wherefore have thy servants set my fields on fire,* he angrily says; to which Absalom returns a quiet politic answer; treating it as a sort of joke, and making known his real object, viz., to induce Joab to move the king to allow him to return to Jerusalem. For some reason, probably to prevent further mischief, Joab agrees to do this, intercedes with the king who gives consent and now, once more, this daring and crafty son of an Ishmaelite mother is in Jerusalem again.

Absalom is by this time a married man, supremely handsome, having a magnificent growth of hair, mentioned in the narrative doubtless because of what followed. Proud he doubtless was of his hair, which he allowed to grow to an inordinate length, only *polling* it, as the scripture phrase is, once a year. (Chap. XIV 26.) No man in the land so handsome as he: *There was not a blemish in him.* But as has

often been the case the handsome physique was belied by the bad qualities of the soul. Thus it was with our King Edward the Fourth, and so, in our own times, was it with George the Fourth, the 'first gentleman in Europe,' and as his portraits show, one of the very handsomest, but of a most contemptible, and debased character; the soul as bad as the body was good.

But in the case of Absalom, the very thing that he was proud of was the means of his destruction. It was by his long hair that he was entangled in the forest so that he was caught and slain. (Chap. XVIII 9.) His handsome person however, had much to do with the furtherance of the design he has formed to seize the reins of government and place himself on the throne. For he proceeds to court popularity, using arts which have often been employed since by men who seek the favor of the multitude. First he makes a show in the city, preparing *chariots and horses* and fifty men to run before him, a proceeding certain to attract attention in the streets, and accustom the populace to the sight of him as a man of state and power. Who is this? the people would cry, running out of their houses to the street, looking out of the casement like Siseras' damsels did; or crowding the house tops to see the show as it passed by. What a handsome man is this son of the king, cry some; Ah, see his lovely hair, say the women of the city, while the men are attracted by his fine chariots and horses. And he would doubtless have men here and there whispering and suggesting what a fine king he would make when his old father was dead. For David, let us bear in mind, was by this time well advanced in years, Absalom himself being about forty, as we learn from verse seven in Chapter XV.

This was the first step in his daring design; and that the king permitted it is evidence that David never dreamed that he had any design at all, beyond the gratification of his vanity.

But now another step is taken. And here again we have a true touch of human nature, a vivid portrait, sketched boldly in few words of the popularity hunter, perfectly true of modern times, as well as times of old. While we hear

Absalom, in a place of public resort crying out, *Oh that I were made a judge in the land, then would I do every man justice*, does it not seem to be an anticipation of the speeches and addresses of our own candidates for municipal or parliamentary honors? Send *me* says the smooth-tongued aspirant, and I will redress your grievances, I will repeal that mischievous law, I will lighten the burden of your taxes; I will make trade and commerce flourish; promises which answer their purpose and are forgotten. What Absalom would have done had he obtained the kingdom we know not. But judging by his antecedents, we would say that being on the throne he would care vastly more for his own pleasure than for rendering justice to his subjects. Such men as Absalom are not the men that care for justice. No wise Solomon, as Solomon was in his early days, would Absalom have been, no Halroun-Ataschid going about quietly through the city noting the wrong and the right; far more likely to be as Solomon was in later life, laying burdens on the people to promote his pleasure in building palaces and laying out gardens, or, as likely as not, a foolish Rehoboam exasperating the people by doubling taxation. Such would have been a likely sequel.

But now we have to see him, with his handsome, smiling face, accosting the people at the gate of the city, speaking to men in a familiar style, asking *What city they came from?* What their cause is; (again reminding us exactly of the arts of a candidate when canvassing electors) pretending to examine the cause in a judicial style; and then with an affectation of solemn regret, declaring *that there was no man deputed of the king to hear him* (v. 2, 3); all which flummery would be readily believed by simple hearted country people from so grand a man as Absalom. And they would talk to one another at the gate about the condescension and goodness of this noble prince, who, instead of wasting time and money in extravagance and pleasure, took the trouble to come himself to the gate, and examine the causes of poor suitors. A most noble prince, so they would say. Ah! if he were only king! Whispers of this kind would circulate about, and Absalom, with infinite subtlety and tact, follows them up by saying to one and another, *Oh that I were only,*

made judge in the land, that every one which hath any suit or cause might come to me and I would do him justice. (v. 4.)

Need we wonder that the narrative follows all this up by saying, *Thus Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel!* But we can and should wonder that all this should be going on without the king or some of his friends and councillors taking notice of it. Probably it was all known, but that, in modern phrase, it was not taken seriously.

The plot at length was conceived to be ripe. *It came to pass after forty years* (evidently after Absalom had passed his fortieth year) that Absalom asked permission of the king to take a journey to *Hebron*. *He had a vow*, he said. The very fact that he had to ask permission showed that a watch was kept upon him. But no evil intent was apparent; in fact, his pretence was to fulfil a vow he had made, when banished from the country, that if the Lord brought him back to Jerusalem then he would serve the Lord. (v. 8.) The consummate liar and hypocrite; adding this deception to his many other sins! His father gave him leave, and not only so, he added his blessing. *Go in peace*, said he to Absalom, little dreaming of the villanous plot that was being concocted for the overthrow of his kingdom.

Once in Hebron, Absalom sent messengers throughout all the tribes to proclaim him king as soon as they heard the sound of the trumpet; a daring thing to do, for what was there in the rule of David to make the tribes dissatisfied with it? *He was not an oppressor.* *His yoke was certainly not grievous.* Why then should they want a change?

We can only answer this question by recalling the fickleness and restlessness of this people at all times; and their readiness for change on the slightest pretext. Were they not the same then—as in the time of our Lord? Undoubtedly they were. No type of national character has been so constant as theirs; and as in the time of the Son of David they crowded round him at one time *to make him a king*, (John VI 15) and at another spurned his doctrine and shouted 'Crucify him;' so they were ready to behave to David himself, at one time rallying loyally round him, saying, *we are thy bone and thy flesh* (chap. v. 1), while now they lis-

tened complacently to these rebellious proposals of Absalom, and were willing that David should be deposed in his favor. Yet not all. For there were many faithful ones, as we shall shortly see.

Absalom induced a band of men to go with him—only two hundred, but sufficient for a nucleus. They were picked men, *called*, as the narrative has it—chosen out by Absalom himself; doubtless under promise of great reward, the real design being kept from them. *They went in their simplicity knowing nothing.** (v. 11.) Thus it generally is with the rank and file of an army, and this excused them.

But there was one man whose conduct is utterly inexcusable. A trusted counsellor of David, AHITOPHEL, a man whose name now has a sound only second in infamy to that of Judas, and who ended his life in the same way. He was sent for by Absalom to Hebron. It is almost certain that he had been consulted before, that Absalom had cautiously hinted at what he was about, had found him open to consider the matter of a change in the kingdom, had obtained his consent on promise of high advancement, and was only waiting in Jerusalem until the signal was given, a course of proceeding which has had its counterpart again and again in modern times, when schemes and plots were on foot, for changes, either in a reigning dynasty, or in the composition of a ministry, under a government like our own. How often has it come to pass that a Prime Minister, all unsuspecting, has had at his Council Board some trusted colleague, who all the while has been intriguing against him, and finds out what has been going on only by a sudden defection and the formation of a party strong enough to overthrow him. Thus it was with this traitor Ahitophel, who, when Absalom had established himself in Hebron, went to lend to the conspiracy all the weight of his name and influence. The *conspir-*

*They went in their simplicity. How many in these days have been ruined, body and soul, by embarking on some course thoughtlessly, in their simplicity, by which they have been drawn into evil companionship, led astray and lost. Is this not a perfect type of the young woman of these days, who, in her simplicity and innocence, listens to the crafty tale of some pretended friend, and is beguiled into taking a journey to the city, ostensibly to obtain honest employment, only to find out, often too late, that her pretended friend was her most deadly enemy.

acy therefore, waxed strong, for the people increased continually with Absalom! (v. 12.)

But now one would expect, naturally, that David, a man of war, victorious in many campaigns, would rouse up his energies and put this audacious rebellion down. That he could have done so, had he set himself to the task, hardly admits of doubt. Were not the whole forces of the kingdom still at his disposal? And, though one councillor had proved a traitor, were there not many faithful ones left? And what of Joab, the valiant and far-sighted captain of the host!

One may ask these questions, and wonder with a sort of awe and astonishment at what did take place. For David, at the very first sound of war, counselled flight! His course was like that of Louis Phillippe when he lost his throne. There can be no doubt that if the king of France had displayed anything like vigor and promptitude he could have rallied the army round him and put down the mutterings of rebellion at once. But Louis Phillippe was not a man of war at all. His flight therefore, is not to be wondered at. But that of David is unaccountable, except on one supposition, viz., that he felt an instinctive conviction that this rebellion was a consequence of his own sin: "I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house, said the prophet in the name of God. True it is, most true, that "conscience makes cowards" of us all. And thus David, the victor in a hundred fights, is paralysed and flies.

Jerusalem has seen many tragical spectacles. But seldom have its old walls witnessed a more melancholy one than King David passing out of the gate of the city, the servants of his house around him all faithful, (let us be thankful for that, for they said, *Behold thy servants are ready for whatsoever my lord the king may appoint*) (v. 15), his chosen guards also with him, faithful too, *all the Cherethites, and all the Pelethites, and all the Gittites* (how the narrative emphasizes the fact that all went with him, and not one forsook him,) and doubtless they wondered that the king did not organize them for the defence of the city, and why he, of all men, should turn his back to the enemy and flee. This was not like the David of former days. But in those former

days he was a man of absolutely simple faith in God. Now, alas, his faith had, for the time, departed from him.* Could he have realized the many declarations of his own Psalms, composed, in better days; of his God being *a Rock, a Refuge, a High Tower, a Shield* to them that trust him, David would have stood his ground, defended the city, and crushed the rebellion at the outset. But alas! He was at the moment like Samson when his strength had departed from him. He instinctively felt that the hand of God was upon him in retribution. And where have we a more pathetic scene than that of the aged king having crossed the brook Kedron, *going up the ascent of Mount Olivet, weeping as he goes up, barefooted, with his head covered*, (v. 30.) his back towards Jerusalem, his face towards *the way of the wilderness*, his train of servants with him, all weeping likewise, with *their heads covered*, the dwellers in the outskirts of the city, as the sorrowful procession passed by, *weeping with a loud voice!* Surely this weeping on David's part was a sign of that *godly sorrow that worketh repentance* unto life, and carried blessing in its train.

For even while he was weeping and sorrowing, faith and courage came back to him, and we find him beginning to take measures, like a wise and capable general, as he was of old, for the recovery of his kingdom. And he was greatly encouraged by an exhibition of loyal devotion on the part of a man not of Israelitish blood, who was in the train of his servants? *Ittai*, the Gittite, deserves to have his name writ large in the catalogue of God's faithful ones; for when the king said to him "*Wherefore goest thou also with us? Return to thy place and abide with the (new) king, for thou art a stranger, and also an exile. Return thou and mercy and truth be with thee!*" (v. 19, 20.) But *Ittai's* heart was with

*There was, in subsequent days in Jerusalem, a man high in authority who refused to flee when his life was threatened, the good and brave governor, *Nehemiah*. *Should such a man as I flee?* Thus spake he when the word was brought that his enemies would come to slay him in the night. (Neh. vi, 11.) And he put refusal on the right ground, viz., that he was appointed to do a great work, and must go through with it, no matter what danger might surround him. But then immediately before this we find him appealing to Almighty God for help: *Now, therefore, O God, strengthen my hands.* (v. 9.)

David, even as the heart of Ruth, the woman of Moab, had been with Naomi; and as Ruth had expressed her constancy and devotion in language that has never been forgotten, so this good man Ittai, in most touching and pathetic language, expressed the purpose of his heart. For he answered the king, *As the Lord liveth, and as my lord the king liveth, SURELY IN WHAT PLACE MY LORD THE KING SHALL BE, WHETHER IN DEATH OR IN LIFE, THERE ALSO WILL THY SERVANT BE !* Surely these words were put into the mouth of this good man by God himself, and were God's answer to his servant's weeping. For it is noticeable that from this time forward the panic which had seized the king passed away. It is evident that he had recovered his calmness of soul, by the directions he gave. And do we not seem to have an echo of these words of Ittai in the memorable declaration of our Lord, shortly before his last passover; spoken too, let us note, of some other strangers and foreigners, who came to see him at the feast: *If any man serve me let him follow me; and where I am there shall my servant be. If any man serve me him will my father honor !* (John XII 26.)

Thus did David to his loyal servant. For, when after a time, he had gathered his forces together and organized his army in three divisions, as armies are organized now, while the command of two of these was given to his old captains, Joab and Abishai, the third was put under the lead of Ittai the Gittite.

The measures taken by the king for the recovery of his throne will come before us in a subsequent chapter. Meanwhile, in considering these striking events, let us never forget the Divine hand, and the way in which He was leading his servant on the rough road of discipline and chastisement, all for the instruction of others of His servants in the chances and changes of life in coming generations.

CHAPTER XII.

ABSALOM'S REBELLION—THE TURNING OF THE TIDE.

(2 Samuel, 15 and 16.)

The darkest hour precedes the dawn, and the narrative before us is a striking illustration of it. The very darkest day of David's life has been unfolding, hour by hour, as we have seen the unnatural conspiracy of his daring and wicked son ripening and coming to a head in open rebellion; the most terrible feature being the manner in which many of the peop' acquiesced, having been seduced from their allegiance by the arts of the wily aspirant to the throne, and by the open defection of one of David's trusted counsellors. These two last were the bitterest drops in the cup of sorrow that was presented to the king, presented by divine appointment, and in accordance with prophecy, in retribution. And it was evidently so accepted. The spirit in which the king met it was that of absolute submission to the Divine will; another of the many points of agreement between David and the Divine Son of David. For a bitter cup of judgment and retribution was also presented even to him, judgment not for his own sin, but *for the sins of the whole world* ! A bitter cup, indeed, and his human heart shrank from it. But Divine love rose above the shrinking of the weakness of man, and he cried out, (it was in the darkness of Gethsemane) *The cup which my father hath given me shall I not drink it ! Not my will but thine be done !* Even so did David say, at the very time when he had left the city, to prevent the effusion of blood ; it was to Zadok the priest he said it,—*If I shall find favor in the eyes of the Lord, He will bring me again, and shew me both it,* (referring to the ark, which he was sending back) *and His habitation,* that is the Tabernacle he so dearly loved. *But if he thus say I have no delight in thee,—behold here am I, let him do to me as seemeth good to Him !* (v. 25, 26.)

In this absolute and blessed submission to the Divine will we have the key to all the success that followed. And thus it ever is. Let any man put himself on this ground of complete submission to the Divine will, and he will find himself in a land of promise indeed.

The first effect of this attitude of submission was a breaking up of heart in penitential weeping; a true indication of blessing to come. (v. 30.) He had wept bitterly before, as we know by his own wonderful Fifty-first Psalm; and had experienced what a writer of spiritual insight called "the mystic joys of penitence." And now, when the full force of chastisement was upon him, and the scourge was making his very flesh writhe with agony, he weeps again in deep humiliation, going up the ascent of Olivet with covered head, all the people weeping in sympathy with the king, and covering their heads in sorrow also. But when he came to the top of the hill, his eyes still overflowing with weeping, and standing near the very spot where the Divine Redeemer looked over Jerusalem and wept, David, doubtless also looking back over the city, found relief in prayer. For when he *was come to the top of the mount he worshipped!* Briefly told; but what a world of meaning and of consequence in that action. HE WORSHIPPED GOD! The third Psalm, stated to be a *Psalm of David when he fled from Absalom his son*, tells us what he said in this approach of soul to His Almighty Protector. And the very words of the psalm reveal the fact that communion of soul had been restored between David and the God he had often glorified in praise. The psalm is like the complaint of a child casting himself in simple confidence on the mother's breast. *Lord*, he begins, *not have mercy upon me, as before, but, how are they increased that trouble me!* Yes, indeed, increased that troubled him; the rising tide of rebellion. And thus has many a troubled soul, using this very language of the king of Israel, poured out its sorrows to Him, who is *touched with the feeling of our infirmities, and was made in all points like unto ourselves, yet without sin*, (Hebrews I v. 5) and he goes on, giving us a glimpse as he speaks of the disaffection and disloyalty that had crept over many of his own people; the

fruit of Absalom's machinations. *Many there be which say of my soul, there is no help for him in God !* Yes, they think ; this affair of Bathsheba and her husband can never be forgiven. God can never help him again.* Little did they know, Hebrews though they were, of the exceeding greatness of the Divine mercy, and how even *blood guittiness*, the very *sin of scarlet*, (how expressive an image—scarlet, the color of blood !) can be forgiven to the penitent soul.

But David has realized it. He knows, even while smarting under deserved punishment, that spiritually his sin is forgiven. Perfect communion is restored, and he exclaims calmly, even while the sounds of disloyalty are in his ears, *But Thou O Lord art a shield for me*; a shield,—yes, even against such *fiery darts* as are being cast at him by the wicked; for this is the language of faith, and faith then, even as in after times was such a shield. (Ephes. VI, 16.)

And so, in the might of such assured Divine help, he cries out, *I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people that have set themselves against me round about*; words that indicate how strangely this rebellious conspiracy had waxed strength after Absalom had sounded the trumpet in Hebron. The fickle multitude were then, even as they were in the time of our Lord, crying, *Hosannah* one week, *Crucify Him* the next. The next petition of the Psalm is one of those at which some good people stumble at times. It seems to breathe a most anti-Christian spirit, and, indeed an anti-Hebrew spirit too. For one of the precepts given through Moses was that an enemy's ox or ass was not to be injured; (Exod. XXIII, 4) and in the Book of Proverbs the precept is given which is quoted almost word for word in the Epistle to the Romans, *If thine enemy hunger give him to eat; if he thirst give him drink !* (Proverbs XXV, 21.)

But it is forgotten that this psalm was written in a time of war, the usages of which were absolutely contrary, by very necessity, from those of peace. The head of an army must do the utmost damage he can to the enemy; and may

*It is evident from this, and many other passages in the Psalms, that there were people in Jerusalem and elsewhere, who were ungodly and unspiritual, to whom David, in his best moments, and as a pious and godly man, was an object of dislike. It was then, even as it is now ; there was a nominal Israel and a spiritual.

pray, lawfully, that his enemies may be *smitten on the cheekbone*, and that *their teeth may be broken*; that is while the conflict is being waged. For when the conflict is over, unless other considerations intervene, soldiers are bound to shew kindness to individuals of the opposite army, say when lying wounded. And very generally they do it*. But now after this pouring out his soul in prayer, a change in tone is almost immediately perceptible in the king. He realizes that he is the king; king by Divine appointment, the anointed of the lord. He is bound, therefore, to take measures for his re-establishment on the throne. And now we at once perceive the touch of the far-sighted and politic warrior and head of the army. The steps he takes are noteworthy.

First, he secures that he shall have trustworthy intelligence from the city. The importance of trustworthy intelligence in war cannot be overestimated, as the South African war shews. Zadok, the priest, takes back the ark, and undertakes to certify the king of what goes on. Then, on being advised of the treachery of Ahitophel, he brings the matter before the Lord, and prays that his counsel may be *turned to foolishness*! Do we do wrong in speaking of this as one of the warlike steps that David takes? Let those deride, or doubt, or take exception, who do not believe in Divine help. But those who do can see its importance. For in the deep wisdom of Almighty God, the whole course of events was made to turn on the counsel of Ahitophel; but in a very unlooked for way as we shall see.

The prayer was put in train of being answered almost as soon as uttered. For a devoted friend of David, a dweller in an adjoining village, Hushai by name,—evidently a well-known man, and of weight in the land, comes out to meet

*It has already been pointed out that many of these Psalms of David are like this third, in that they relate to times and circumstances of war, so that he who, in private life was eminent for forbearance and forgiveness, breathes out, perforce, strong petitions for the defeat, the overthrow, or the death of his enemies. The reader may also be reminded that the same principle applies to those precepts of Moses in which the law of retaliation is laid down. The text plainly shows that the words, *An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth*, are directions for the administration of justice, and the punishment of offences against the law, not directions for private conduct in any degree, (Exod. xxi. 24) though they were falsely interpreted as such by the Pharisees.

him, his whole demeanor expressing deep sympathy. *His coat is rent and earth is upon his head.* (v. 32.) He is ready to go with David; he proposes to go. But David, with a quick intuition,—it was indeed a God-given wisdom in answer to prayer,—sees that Hushai may be more useful in another capacity. Now let us remember that this is a time of war; and that the function of a spy is not only lawful, but as necessary as it is dangerous, and honorable in proportion to the danger. Let us remember, too, that stratagems and deceit with the enemy are part of the universally recognized usages of war; and that every wise general takes means to guard against them.

This will explain what David now does.

Hushai, he concludes, can best serve him as a spy. It is a dangerous duty, but he is willing to undertake it.

It is arranged, therefore, that he is to return to the city, and tender his allegiance to Absalom, offering to serve him. Thus, said David, *thou mayest for me defeat the counsel of Ahitophel.* And he adds, *Hast thou not there with thee Zadok and Abiathar the priests,* (Abiathar, the true and tried friend of former days) *therefore it shall be that what thing soever thou shalt hear out of the king's house thou shalt tell it to the priests.* (v. 35.)

Each of these had a son, and by them, whatever was heard was to be conveyed to David, who remained, for some time, not more than a few hours' journey from the city. But now the king, in pursuing his journey, meets some singular experiences. When descending the further slope of Olivet, his company is met by Ziba, that steward of Mephibosheth, the son of his friend Jonathan, whom David had put in charge of the lame youth's property. He brings large supplies of provisions, and in answer to the question, where was his master Mephibosheth? made the lying answer that he had remained in Jerusalem, saying, *now shall the house of Israel restore to me the kingdom of my father.* Not a word of truth was there in this answer, as we learn later on; but it imposed upon the king, who hastily said, *Behold, thine are all that pertained to Mephibosheth!* A rash sentence, indeed, a confiscation on unsupported testimony, a deed unworthy of a prince whose knowledge of men was so large as David's.

Once, he had said in his haste, that *all* men were liars; a saying far indeed from the truth; but to give away the property of this unfortunate cripple so hastily was far more reprehensible. Kings, and all persons in power, are bound by the very conditions of high office to be cautious how they act on mere reports, lest in acting, they wrong men who are innocent.

As to Ziba himself, his treachery was only too much the way of the world.

But passing on, the king and his company enter the narrow and rugged defiles along which the road winds leading down to the plain of Jordan. David had concluded to pass out of the scene of immediate danger to a place where he could quietly rest, collect his forces and wait the course of events. The summit of Olivet is more than three thousand feet above the Jordan plain, and the descent, through the rocky ridges of the pass is rapid. The road has always been a difficult and dangerous one; a resort of thieves as in the days of our Lord, when he told of the man who, in descending it in travelling to Jericho was robbed and nearly murdered. While David was passing on this road with his company, a man of the house of Saul, Shimei by name, keeping on the high ridges above the road, passed on too, cursing the king, and throwing stones down upon him, imprecating a curse upon him as a *bloody man* and a *man of Belial*, whom God was now punishing for the blood he had shed of the house of Saul. There are parts of the road within three miles of Jerusalem where this could easily be done. When reading in some of David's psalms the strong descriptions he gives of his enemies, how he speaks of them as *boasting in mischief*, with their *tongues set on fire, all devouring, even as sharp swords*, adding lying to cursing, we may think the descriptions figurative, and exaggerated in an Oriental fashion. But incidents like this of Shimei help us to understand the kind of men that David had to deal with, and that the descriptions of the Psalms are true to reality.

Whether David deserved these violent imprecations or not is shown by what follows. Naturally some of his followers are incensed as the stones fly about, and the curses sound through the air. Abishai, the brother of Joab, asks

permission to go up to the rocks and take off his head. *Why should this dead dog*, he said, *curse my lord the king?* It would have been easy to do it, and richly Shimei deserved it. But no, David will not: *Let him curse*, he said. It is the Lord's will. And he went on to say, with a strange touch of sadness, *Behold my own son which came forth of my bowels, seeketh my life. How much more then this Benjamite? Let him alone; let him curse.* And then with that fine instinct which teaches a servant of God to get good out of evil and to see the Divine hand in all things, and specially in adverse events, he goes on to say, *It may be that the Lord will look on mine affliction and will requite me good for his cursing this day.* (Chap. XVI, v. 5 to 13.) Thus in the very spirit of the New Testament he commits his cause to Him who judgeth righteously. And his faith was honored, as we shall see.

It is noticeable that all this time there is not a word about Joab. Where he was, what he was doing, we know not. He does appear however, at the right time, at the head of the army.

While the king is thus passing on, *weary*, as the narrative says,—for it is a very rough road,—his faithful friend Hushai proceeds to Jerusalem; and finding Absalom, enters his presence with the salutation so well known to ourselves: *God save the king! God save the king!*

Absalom replies with a sort of sarcasm: What, art thou come here, Hushai? thou, so great a friend of David! *Is this thy kindness to thy friend?* To forsake him in his extremity. *Why waitest thou not with thy friend?* The sarcasm is in the double use of the word friend, as we may see. And now Hushai begins to play his part and he does it with consummate skill. Again let us remember that this is a time of war, and that his coming to Absalom at all was a stratagem of war, Hushai taking his life in his hand, as all spies do; being willing to undertake so dangerous a mission out of love and loyalty to his master.

In reply to the evident sarcasm of Absalom's greeting, and the enquiry, why waitest thou not with thy friend, Hushai replies, in words which would be perfectly true in

waited

any case, *Nay, but whom the Lord, and His people, and all the men of Israel choose, his will I be and with him will I serve.* Very true, and very sure ground to take, going to the very foundation on which the Israelitish kingdom was built. Whom *the Lord* shall choose. Thus even while he speaks, he is conveying a strong hint to this usurper that he was not standing on sure ground. This part of his declaration is however, passed over, and he goes on, carrying out his mission as a spy, to profess allegiance and service to Absalom. This was evidently accepted, for we find very shortly afterward that he is taken into intimate confidence and placed in the same rank as Ahitophel.

Do we not see the hand of the Great Judge and Lord of all in this ? Doubtless it was working in the direction which Divine retribution often takes, that is, in inducing a spirit of blindness and lack of judgment in those upon whom it operates. Ahitophel was doubtless consulted as to whether Hushai should be received into full confidence. And that he gave his consent, as he must have done, shows a singular absence of the sagacity and caution one would expect from a counsellor of experience. Ahitophel knew very well that spies were part of the ordinary machinery of war, and a little exercise of prudence would suggest to him to be cautious about so well known a friend of David's as Hushai. And the more he protested, the more Ahitophel should have been cautious. There is a well-known saying of political and business life, "Methinks he doth protest too much," that is perfectly applicable to this case.

But the spirit of judgment was absent and the spirit of blindness was upon him. *The breath of the Lord was a bridle in his jaws, causing him to err.* (Isai. XXX, 28.) For *the word of the Lord*, as we learn from the same prophecy (Chap. XXVIII, 13) is sometimes so spoken that men *may be broken and snared and taken by it.* This is when the word is intended to be retributive and punitive ; and so it was coming to pass, as David had prayed, that the counsel of Ahitophel was being *turned to foolishness* ; another way of saying, let him give foolish counsel. Yet when in the way of loyal service and duty, no counsel was so highly esteemed as his. It was, as the narrative states, *as if a man had enquired*

at the oracle of God. But as is so often the case, the higher the elevation, the deeper the fall.

For now Ahitophel gave a counsel which was intended to produce, and would have produced, a permanent separation between the father and the son. The advice that he should take to himself his father's concubine, was equivalent to a stab in a vital part,—a deadly insult. So it would be esteemed by the people in that age, for if the counsel were taken, *all Israel would hear that thou art abhorred of thy father*, (v. 21.) The advice was taken; the counsel followed, and David for the time, was humiliated and dishonored before all the people of Jerusalem.* Yet in this we can trace the working of an exact retribution and the fulfilment of the word spoken by the prophet Nathan. David's great sin was a violation of the sanctities of domestic life, and the punishment threatened was that the same fate should befall him, but even in a greater degree. And now it has come to pass.

But this is the very last stroke of the chastising scourge. The full tale of punishment has been meted out to him. The tide turns rapidly in his favor, and his life henceforth, with one exception, is marked by unbroken victory and prosperity.

Thus do the counsels of God open out, wonderfully, page by page, before us. Let him that readeth understand.

*It is evident that in some measure, although only concubines, these women had the status and position of wives, for it is expressly foretold in Nathan's prophecy of threatening, that what Absalom did should be done to wives. At all events the insult was as deadly, so far as David was concerned.

CHAPTER XIII.

RETRIBUTION UPON ABSALOM AND AHITOPHEL.—ABSALOM'S DEFEAT AND DEATH.

(2 Samuel, 17 : 18.

It is evident that by this time a large military force was at Absalom's disposal, and the pressing question of the hour would be, What shall be done respecting David ? The position called for a council of war. And a council of war was convened. The first to speak was Ahitophel, and his counsel was undoubtedly wise. The question was, shall David be pursued at once with such forces as were available, or shall there be a general summons sent through the land, and such a force gathered as would be overwhelming. The debate in council was of profound interest, and we may almost watch the powers of Heaven looking on, and guiding the issue to a pre-destined end. For the life and destiny of David were involved in the issue. Let us realize the scene and hear the actors speak; for the narrative gives the very words they said.

AHITOPHEL, as is his right, speaks first, and he is for immediate action. And this is what he said: *Let me now choose out twelve thousand men, (a number that indicates the hold that the conspiracy had taken) and I will arise and pursue after David this night. And I will come upon him while he is weary and weakhanded and will make him afraid. And all the people that are with him shall flee. And I will smite the king only; and bring back all the people unto thee. The man whom thou seekest is as if all returned; and all the people shall be in peace.* (v. 1, 2, 3.) Counsel, this, that reminds us of some conflicts of mediaeval times, when kings went to battle in person; and if the king were slain, the war was over.

It is plain that this was wise counsel, for David's little company would have been utterly overwhelmed in the on

set, and he himself, doubtless, smitten and slain. Then the throne would have been Absalom's. And it is called wise counsel in this very narrative, but it is added that *the Lord had appointed to defeat it.* (v. 14.) For the Lord was indeed a shield for David in this crisis. The saying of Ahitophel pleased Absalom and the elders well, and David's life seemed in imminent danger.

But God was his shield and was working for his preservation, which came about through the counsel of HUSHAI. What Hushai said was this: *The counsel that Ahitophel hath given is not good at this time.* For, speaking to Absalom, *thou knowest thy father and his men that they be mighty men, and they be chafed in their minds as a bear robbed of her whelps.* (Very true, thought Absalom.) Then Hushai went on to say, *Thy father is a man of war,* (and familiar with its stratagems, of course,) *and will not lodge with the people; behold he is hid now in some pit, or some other place.* (Very true again, no doubt, thought Absalom, his heart warming to this apparently sagacious counsel.) *And it will come to pass,* pursued the wily spy, *when some of them be overthrown at first that whosoever heareth it will say: There is slaughter among the people that follow Absalom. And he also that is valiant, whose heart is as the heart of a lion shall utterly melt; for all Israel doth know that thy father is a mighty man and they which be with him are mighty men.* This last was undeniable. Absalom knew that well; and was more and more impressed with what Hushai was saying.

Therefore, he went on, *I counsel that all Israel be gathered together, from Dan even to Beersheba, as the sand that is by the sea shore for multitude and that thou go to battle in thine own person.* Excellent, thought Absalom, his vanity doubtless flattered by the last piece of advice, so different from Ahitophel's, who had proposed to have all the glory of defeating David himself. But Hushai went on, *So shall we come upon him in some place where he shall be found, and we will light upon him as the dew falleth upon the ground, and of him and all the men that are with him, there shall not be left so much as one.* Moreover, he concluded, *if he be gotten into a city, then shall all Israel bring ropes to that city, and we will draw it into the river until there be not one small stone found there.* (v. 7 to 13.)

Absalom's eyes must have been kindling at the idea of leading this brilliant expedition, otherwise Hushai would hardly have dared to 'fool him to the top of his bent' in this fashion.

It is perfectly evident that Hushai's object was to gain time for David to get over Jordan and to gather and organize a force. That was the pressing need of the hour. And Hushai's counsel was exactly suited to bring this about; for it is evident that it would take considerable time to send word to all Israel from Dan to Beersheba, to gather recruits, organize them into troops and divisions, and bring them to Jerusalem, or any other central point. During this time David could be doing the same thing, and with all the advantage of traditional right, the prestige of a long reign, and great personal popularity.

And this was what happened. Let us remember that it was all of *the Lord*. He, in His wonderful working brought it about that the advice of Ahitophel was rejected and that of Hushai taken. (v. 14.)

It is not the only instance in which, without any special Divine intervention, the counsel of sage and experienced men has been passed by, and the counsel of younger and less experienced men taken. And few things are more galling; more trying to the temper, more calculated to produce heart-burnings; few things call for more fortitude and patience on the part of him who suffers it. And the trial was more than Ahitophel could bear. Sage and far-seeing as he was in counsel, he had not that divine quality of patience and long-suffering which are so often called for in the exigencies of life. Overcome by vexation at the slight which had been put upon him, he *saddled his ass, left Jerusalem and gat him home to his city, put his household in order, and hanged himself and died.* (v. 23.) He was buried in the sepulchre of his father, but has left a dishonored name; having set himself against the Lord's anointed, the Divinely-appointed king, and used his position and talents in furtherance of one of the most wicked rebellions in history.

Hushai loses no time in sending word to David to pass over Jordan, evidently lest Absalom should change his mind

and conclude after all, to attack the king at once. The messengers, the sons of the priests, accomplished their object. But they passed through a dangerous experience on the journey back. For they were observed. Word was brought to Absalom. Men were sent to apprehend the young men, and their lives would have paid the forfeit had they been caught. But God was watching over them also, for David's sake. They were hidden by a loyal woman in the cistern of her house, and when questioned by Absalom's messengers, she denied that they were there.

We are not concerned to defend every action that may be related, even of those who are doing God service in the main. It is, however, only right to point out that the usages of war have always been held to justify deceit towards the enemy. The woman had espoused David's side. Her hiding the messengers was a part of the operations of war, and all would acknowledge that, on this ground, she might be justified in protecting them by deceit.

Be that as it may, her deceit saved the lives of the young men. David now crossed the Jordan at once, and made his way to the rugged mountainous country of Gilead, fixing his camp at that memorable spot, Mahanaim, where the angels had met and protected his ancestor, Jacob, many ages before. Through the deep defiles of this region flowed, and still flows, the brook Jabbok; and no better spot could have been chosen to enable a small force to encounter a larger one. Here David met many friends. Some of them were of the Ammonite tribes whom he had subdued (Chap. XII, 29) and who proved, as many conquered nations have done, loyal and faithful to their conqueror. *The son of Nahash* the prince of the Ammonites remembered David's former kindness to his father, subdued though his nation had been; and rendered needful help. Machir, too, of Lo-debar, who had formerly sheltered Mephibosheth; he also lived in this region of Gilead; as well as a fine old patriarch, Barzilai of Rogelim, *a very great man* (chap. xix. 32), now four score years old. All these rallied round the king, and brought to his camp large supplies of provisions, as well as other necessities. It is curious to note the detail of these timely supplies, the narrator dwelling on them with much particularity

as evidences of good will; and doubtless also remembering the great source of all good, the God of David, who was inspiring his subjects with such loyal feelings in a most critical time. Strange, one may think, that these dwellers in a remote region like Gilead, should be faithful while the people of Jerusalem for whom David had done so much,—indeed he may almost be called its founder, for before him it was a mere hill fort,—should forsake him and receive Absalom. But such is the way of the world!

The supplies of provisions are stated to have comprised *Wheat, Barley, Flour, Parched corn, Beans, Lentiles, and Parched pulse*; there was also *Honey, and Butter, and Sheep and Cheese*; all which sounds wonderfully modern, and might be a schedule of the commissariat of Lord Kitchener in his South African campaign.

THE SHOCK OF CONFLICT.

After some delay, used in augmenting his forces, according to Hushai's counsel, Absalom took the field, assuming the chief command himself, and making Amasa, a cousin of Joab, captain of the host. He followed after David and came up with him in Mahanaim.

David, on his part, had been gathering a considerable host, as he passed along through the well-peopled country beyond Jordan. And now, with a true military genius, he arrayed his army in three divisions, setting them in what we would call regiments and troops, with *captains of thousands and captains of hundreds*. At the head of one division was his old chief captain, Joab; another was placed in charge of Ahishai, Joab's brother, the command of the third being given to that most loyal follower, ITTAL, the Gittite, David himself superintending all, as commander-in-chief. The whole formed an aggregate of military talent with which Absalom's force could not be compared for a moment. With such men in command, even with a much inferior force, the issue could not be doubtful.

David himself proposed to accompany the army to battle, but the proposal brought forth one of the most beautiful and

touching instances of affectionate devotion recorded in history.

I will surely go forth with you myself also, said the king. But the people answered, *Thou shalt not go forth, for if we flee away they will not care for us; neither if half of us die will they care for us.* BUT NOW, THOU ART WORTH TEN THOUSAND OF US ! Therefore now it is better that thou succor us out of the city, (v. 2, 3) that is, evidently, holding a force in reserve behind city walls for the purpose. *Thou art worth ten thousand of us !* What a tribute to the attractive and magnetic power of the character of the king. And again, we cannot but notice the parallel between David and David's son and Lord, who by his cross and passion, and his wonderful love therein, has drawn the hearts, not of thousands, nor tens of thousands, but of millions of faithful souls, who for Him and His kingdom, have lived and labored, and died. *I, if I be lifted up*, he said, *will draw all men to me !* (John XII, 32) a word spoken eighteen hundred years ago, representing a new force in the world a force little known to the 'wise and prudent' of the world,' but which has been operating with marvellous spiritual results, all down the centuries, and was never more powerful than at the present day.*

Before any battle took place David gave a direction respecting the person of Absalom which reveals the depth, not only of his family affection, but of the spirit of forbearance and forgiveness which he had shown before in the case of Saul. He might very well, considering Absalom's scandalous conduct, have left him, in case he were taken, to the wrath of an outraged soldiery. But no. Even while waging strenuous war as king against his unnatural son, his heart as a father went out in pity towards him. Poor, misguided fool, he seems to say, he shall be mercifully dealt with in spite of

*Napoleon, during the greater part of his career had an almost unparalleled attractive force over his soldiers, any one of whom would have said "Thou art worth more than ten thousand of us." But in his latter days, in the quiet of St. Helena, he contrasted, mournfully, the attraction that he had once possessed with the strong, persistent, and world wide attraction which Jesus of Nazareth had exercised and was exercising over millions of the human race.

all his faults. So the king gives a charge to all his three generals, Joab, Abishai, Ittai, *Deal gently, for my sake, with the young man, even Absalom!* And all the people heard it. (v. 5.)

But Joab and Abishai were not the kind of men to pay much attention to this. Nor did they.

The host was now set in array and marched out of the city by hundreds and by thousands, the king looking on, reviewing them as they passed. (v. 4.) The ground on which they were to operate was rocky, hilly and largely covered with woods, and the battle was *scattered over the face of the country*. (Chap. XVIII, 8.) The issue could not be long in doubt, with an army so well led as David's on the one side and on the other, scarcely any lead at all. Absalom's army was defeated at once, and his soldiers fled in confusion, rushing down the rocky defiles in wild panic, numbers of them leaping to their death, so that as the narrative states *the wood devoured more people that day than the sword*.*

And now occurred that tragic scene by which Absalom has become best remembered. He is flying from the scene of battle, and the utter want of discipline in his army, is shown by the fact that he was alone. Not a man of his escort is with him. He rides a mule, and rides hard; galloping furiously up and down through the woods. His head covering has fallen off in his flight, and his long hair is streaming in masses behind him. He comes to a place where the brush wood is thick, the trees dense, and the boughs low. It is difficult to get through, but he is riding for his life at desperate speed. All at once he feels himself caught by the hair,

*Knowledge of locality is all-important in Old Testament study, far more than in the New. A person might know little or nothing about the locality of the events recorded in the New Testament, and yet take in the full measure of instruction to be derived from them. But many of the events of the Old Testament seem utterly unreasonable, and contradictory until we understand the character of the ground. In this case, persons who conceive of these woods being spread over a level, or moderately hilly country, find it difficult to understand how the wood could 'devour more than the sword.' But when we understand that the country was wild, rocky, and broken, we can easily see that swarms of men flying in panic would stumble, fall over precipices, roll down into ravines, and if not killed outright be so maimed as to be incapable of rising, and die of their wounds in the tangled bushes.

and the violence of the shock, at the pace he was riding at, caused an entanglement from which he could not extricate himself. The mule galloped wildly on, naturally enough; he is dragged from her back, and now the very hair of which he was so vain, and which had helped his popularity, proved his ruin. *He hung between Heaven and earth*, (v. 9) and it is perfectly plain that he would be helpless.

ABSALOM'S DEATH.

In this condition he was found by one of David's pursuing soldiers, who laid no hand on him, but found Joab and told him. Joab was angry with the man and burst out, *What! Thou sawest him, and didst not smite him. Why, I would have given thee ten shekels of silver and a girdle.* But the man was a loyal and faithful servant of his master, and replied at once, *I would not have done it for a thousand shekels of silver, for in our hearing, the king charged thee and Abishai and Ittai, Beware that none touch the young man Absalom.* But Joab was in no mood to stand parleying. *I cannot stop with thee*, he said. And he prepared at once to kill Absalom, for, as to his dealing gently with him, he scorned the charge that had been given. He had scorned David's advice in such matters before, and he was as much a hard, unscrupulous man of blood as ever.

He was guided to the spot where Absalom was hanging. The wretched rebel was still alive. Apparently, he makes no supplication for mercy, knowing that it was useless to ask it from Joab; and the general, with three darts, stabs him through the heart, some young men, Joab's armour bearers, very unnecessarily taking part in the business, and 'slaying the slain.'

Absalom was *buried in the wood* wherein he was defeated and a *very great heap of stones* (v. 17) piled over his grave. A young man of talent and great force of character, he might, had he had the fear of God, have grown to occupy a high place in the kingdom, and possibly succeeded to the throne. For he was much older than Solomon, who up to this time had taken no part in the affairs of the kingdom.

But he was utterly destitute of the fear of God. His mother who was of an Ishmaelite family, was doubtless a heathen. And as a heathen Absalom behaves, in everything that the narrative relates. His attempt to seize the throne is one of the most scandalous events of history. And his utter heartlessness in moving every force at his command to bring about David's death stands out in lurid contrast to his father's kind directions as to him. He was overcome with pride and vanity; and had erected for himself in the King's Dale, called now the valley of Jehoshaphat, a pillar which he called by his name (v. 18.) The well-known monument called Absalom's Pillar, standing out so conspicuously in the valley of Jehoshaphat, now, just outside the walls of Jerusalem, is certainly not the one that Absalom reared up. Its architecture is much too modern. But it is most probably on the same site, and it perpetuates his unfortunate name and memory.

The story of what happened after the death of Absalom is one of the most touching in Scripture. Naturally some of the younger men were eager to be employed in carrying the news to David, and two of them volunteered to go. But even the hard and unsympathetic Joab was moved, when he remembered the depth of passionate love which he well knew the father cherished to the son. We all know how, when a dearly loved son or daughter has been called away, the news is kept back from a father or a mother, and only gradually broken, quietly and cautiously, lest the shock have evil results. Joab, then, when Ahimaaz (one of the messengers who had been employed to bring news from Jerusalem) proposed to go over at once with the news to David, forbade him, *Thou shalt not bear tidings this day, but another day, —because the king's son is dead!*

But very soon he changed his mind, no doubt seeing that the news would be sure to reach David in some way, and feeling that the tidings ought to come from himself, as chief captain. He therefore calls another young man, Cushai by name, instructing him to go and tell the king *what he had seen*. But, on seeing this, Ahimaaz, very naturally, desires

to go too, and being given leave, he runs after Cush, and passes him.

The picture of the king, waiting and watching all this while is very touching. He takes his post outside the walls near the gates of the city, which city, we must remember, was in the country across the Jordan. A watchman ascends to the flat roof to look out. Soon, looking round, he catches sight, in the distance, of a man running alone. This was Ahimaaz. The king, hearing that he is running alone, is sure he comes as a messenger, and not as a soldier fleeing from battle. For then there would be many together. Cush then comes in sight, and the king says, If he is alone he brings tidings too. The watchman then recognizes Ahimaaz, and the king augurs from this, he being the priest's son, and so trusted, that his tidings is good.

Ahimaaz soon comes up to the king. He breaks the news very discreetly. *All is well*, he cries, and making profound obeisance, he announces a great victory. *The Lord had delivered up the men who had lifted up their hands against the king !* (v. 28.)

Surely, as king, he would exult and rejoice, but at this time, the feelings of the father were overpowering the judgment of the king. For he immediately inquires, *Is the young man Absalom safe ?* To this Ahimaaz gives an evasive answer, *He saw a tumult but he knew not what it was.*

But now Cush comes up. He cries out, even before he comes near (we can fancy him, hot and flushed with the endeavor to be first,) *Tidings, my lord the king !* And he goes on also to announce victory, in almost the same words, dwelling on the fact that the men that *rose up against the king* had been subdued, and giving the glory to the Lord. (v. 31.)

But again, it is the father rather than the king that is listening. *Is the young man Absalom safe ?* he again queries, no doubt auguring the worst from Ahimaaz' silence. But Cush gives a plain answer. *The enemies of my lord the king and all that rise against thee to do thee hurt be as that young man is.* (v. 32.)

The truth then is out. Absalom is slain, and the scene that ensues is one of the most moving in all history. The grief of David seems almost unnatural, considering what

sort of a son Absalom had been. But all experience shows that the grief of a father over the wasted and dishonored life of a son, and his untimely death, is even more bitter than the grief felt when a son passes away who is an honor to the house. Thus here. *The king was much moved. He went weeping to his chamber, and burst out in an agony of grief. O my son Absalom ! My son, my son Absalom ! Would God I had died for thee ! O Absalom my son, my son !*

And every father, who has wept over the death of a prodigal son, will understand and sympathise with him.

CHAPTER XIV.

DAVID'S RESTORATION TO HIS THRONE AND RETURN TO JERUSALEM.

(2 Samuel, 19, Etc.)

It can scarcely be a matter of wonder that a man like Joab should be angry, and should show his anger at what he deemed such an unseemly exhibition of grief on David's part at the death of Absalom. The king's grief was doubtless as much for the wasted life and talents, and the untimely end of a son who had brought misery and death to thousands, as for the mere death of a son in itself. This was the real sting of the matter ; the bitterness, the exceeding bitterness of the cup he had to drink.

And so his grief continued, hour after hour and day after day, while the whole army and the people of the city sorrow in sympathy, *the victory of the day being turned into mourning*. But Joab at last became angry ; and spoke to the king in a characteristically rough fashion, upbraiding him with *shaming his servants that had saved his life and the lives of his family. Thou lovest thine enemies*, he declared, *and hatest thy friends ; for thou hast declared this day that thou regardest neither princes nor servants*. Then he adds, with a very bitter touch of sarcasm, *for this day I perceive that if Absalom had lived, and we all had died this day, then it had pleased thee well !* (v. 5, 6.)

This was plain speaking indeed, such as kings have very seldom heard, especially Oriental kings. But Joab was commander of the army, and was moreover the king's own cousin ; and a privileged man. He had used this privilege before now, to David's discomfort, but he had never said such things as he did this day. For he went on, assuming almost a tone of command. *Now, therefore, arise, go forth and speak comfortably unto thy servants ;* and he added a violent threat, *for I swear by the Lord, if thou goest not forth*

there will not tarry one with thee this night ; and that will be worse unto thee than all the evil that befel thee from thy youth until now. (v. 7.)

This was undeniably true ; for at such a time, if the army, flushed with victory as it was, had disbanded and forsaken him ; he could not have been re-instated on the throne, and the land would probably have been torn to pieces by faction.

This mourning for Absalom must have continued for days before Joab remonstrated, for we read that the people had *fled to their tents*, and that *there was strife throughout all the tribes of Israel, saying, The king saved us out of the hand of our enemies, and of the Philistines and now he has fled out of the land for Absalom ; and Absalom himself is dead whom we had chosen king. (v. 9, 10.)* All which is most natural. Strife in Jerusalem would be sure to be bitter,—family would be divided against family,—and bitter reproaches and taunts for those who had joined Absalom, and probably threats used on both sides. And thus a condition of incipient anarchy was beginning to develop, amid which some wise and prudent ones said, *and why speak ye not a word of bringing the king back.* Most true. To bring him back was the pressing necessity of the time.

David, in fact, was forgetting himself ; and forgetting his position and duty in the excess of his grief ; as men are always apt to do, even in these days. In fact, men need to be watchful over their grief, as well as over other emotions and passions. For, in some cases it so utterly unmans men, as to make them unfit to fulfil the obligations of life. There is a sort of luxury of grief which has the aspect of virtue, but which, like some other things that look like virtue, is only a development of selfishness.

And well it is, if some wise and faithful friend does to them, at such a time of forgetfulness, what Joab did to David, reminding them that their business, their family, their clients, their patients, have claims on their attention which cannot be passed by without grievous wrong. And even if the remonstrance is blunt and homely ; better that than not at all. And the more serious the responsibility,

the more pressing the necessity. If a merchant, because he has lost his wife or an only son, shuts himself up for weeks, allowing his bills to be protested, his customers to be neglected, and his business to be thrown into confusion, if a doctor, for the same reason should be so thrown off his balance as to neglect his patients and so aggravate suffering and perhaps endanger life, if a lawyer refuses to attend court and watch the interest of his clients, they might, in the eyes of some, be excused as being men of finer sensibilities than ordinary men. Excessive grief, they might say, only proved extraordinary love; and, love, surely, even if extraordinary, is not to be severely blamed. All which is plausible enough, but it overlooks the fundamental consideration by which human society is held together, viz., that every man shall do his duty in his own sphere, to his fellow man day by day. Having done this, a man may indulge his grief as he will, and none can reproach him.

Now it was not so much that David was mourning for Absalom, as any father would mourn, under similar circumstances, but that he was so mourning, and mourning so long, as to bring damage to his kingdom and injury to his subjects.

That was the burden of the remonstrance, and the incident, like so many others in the life of this remarkable man, is fruitful of instruction for men who are living out their life and dealing, as they best can, with the chances and changes of the world as they have to do with it now.

David was, however, thoroughly roused by the appeal of Joab, and at once vigorously resumed the reins of kingship, sending word to the priests, his friends in Jerusalem, to stir up the people of the city, and bring them back to their allegiance. For the question would at once arise with those who had given in their adhesion to Absalom, What will David do with us if he should return? Will he not make an example of the men who were prominent in Absalom's favor? Will there not be trials and executions for treason, and if so, some might think: Had we not better either fly or resist; look out for some other king, some descendant of Saul, perhaps, and elevate him to the throne? Such ideas as these were most natural. And we have seen them operating more than once

in modern times. When the Scotch rising in favor of the Stuarts took place and was put down by force of arms, there were many searchings of heart amongst the men and women who had joined in the movement, and, though many were spared, for the multitude could not be punished, numbers of the leaders were arraigned for high treason, put to death, and their estates confiscated. So with the rising of Monmouth in the reign of James II, followed by that terrible bloody assize conducted by the infamous Judge Jeffries. There were executions following the downfall of Napoleon, though very few, for all Europe was weary of blood-shedding. And it is to the honor of the great Duke of Wellington, that when the Prussians, in the bitterness of their revenge, proposed to put Napoleon himself to death, he utterly refused to concur in it. And it is, too, to the eternal honor of the American people of the North, that when the great war against the South ended in their favor, there were no trials for high treason, and no executions. The only trials and executions were of the actual murderers of President Lincoln.

But the great precedent for all this clemency was offered by King David himself. His message to the people of Jerusalem and the elders of Judah was an assurance of good will. *Ye are my brethren*, he assured them by the priests Zadok and Abiathar ; *Ye are my bones and my flesh*,—echoing the very words spoken to him many years before when he was called by all the tribes to reign over them. (Chap. V, 1.) It was the men of Judah, David's own tribe, who were most to blame in the audacious rebellion, for Hebron, of all cities, was the centre from whence it sprung, and Jerusalem had opened its gates, and given Absalom welcome. For very shame, if not for fear, they dared not move first in the matter of bringing the king back. The first word was spoken in the other tribes. The condition was much like that which prevailed in England when General Monk was endeavoring to bring back Charles the Second, for there were unds of men who were afraid of their lives in case he should return.

It was, then, to the men of Judah and Jerusalem that

David sent the message of good will, adding. *Wherefore are ye, ye men of Judah, my own tribe, my bones and my flesh, the last to bring back the king ?* (v. 11.) It is as clear as possible that beneath these stirring words lay the assurance that none would be punished for their share in the rebellion. No, not even the most prominent. For the king at once anticipates the question, What of the leaders ? What of the man who took command of Absalom's army ? And, anticipating this he does a very striking thing; a thing which certainly seems to carry generosity to excess, but which has a most remarkable effect,—the very effect intended.

The most prominent person in Absalom's rebellion after Ahitophel (who was now dead) was Amasa, a relative of Joab, and of David, too, who had accepted the command of Absalom's army. He might, very naturally, have been excepted and marked out for punishment. But the king not only pardoned him, but announced his intention to make him captain of the host in the room of Joab ! A most extraordinary course. The intention was conveyed through the elders of Judah. *Say ye to Amasa, (he had evidently got back to Jerusalem after his army was defeated,) Art thou not of my bone and of my flesh ? God do so to me and more also, if thou be not captain of the host before me continually in the room of Joab !* (v. 13.)

This was an excess of generosity indeed, for surely it would have been quite enough to pardon him. But to give him a high post in his army would surely lead to an outburst of anger and jealousy amongst his own captains, while to take such a step as to make him chief captain in place of Joab, was certainly calculated to make that unscrupulous chief an enemy for life. It was in fact, a rash step, taken in haste, partly inspired by anger against Joab, for killing Absalom, and for his rough remonstrance, and partly, as we have seen, by an extreme desire to propitiate the good will of the men of Judah. In this matter, David's warmth of feeling (and he was above all a man of strong feelings, he would not have been a poet otherwise,) his warmth of feeling, and it was a generous feeling, led him to make a most rash and dangerous promise. And thus we see how even a good trait of character, when manifested in excess and not

guided by wisdom, may become a real fault. David's mourning for Absalom showed a depth of parental affection that did him honor, but to indulge it so long as he did was endangering the peace of his kingdom. And to pardon Amasa was an act of most singular forbearance and forgiveness; but to go beyond this and give him the chief command of the army was rash in the extreme, carrying forbearance to excess. For as we shall shortly see it led to terrible consequences.

But the immediate effect was to kindle the enthusiasm of the men of Judah to a high pitch of zeal, for, as the narrative declares, *he bowed the heart of all the men of Judah as one man*; so that they sent him a message at once to return, with his whole train.

The people of Israel, apart from Judah, had already taken the same part, saying, *Why is there no word of bringing the king back.* v. 10.) The way then was prepared and the king set out to return to Jerusalem.

And now some significant incidents occurred.

The men of Judah, to prove their loyalty, came down to the Jordan valley to conduct the king over the river and escort him to Jerusalem. But strange to say, Shimei, the Benjamite, whose conduct to the king on the way down was so scandalous,—he accompanied the men of Judah. One would have thought that a man who had done what he had done would remain quiet; seeking to hide in unnoticed obscurity, or perhaps to get away to a distant part of the country for a time till the storm blew over, and his action was forgotten. But he took another course, a bold course indeed, and dangerous. He determined to go and present himself to the king, confessing his perverseness, and begging forgiveness. He had no doubt heard of David's forgiveness of the men of Jerusalem, for he lived close by. And he would cast himself on the king's generosity too and a large company of the tribe of Benjamin came with him,—a thousand men it is said,—for they had not been included in the amnesty to Judah,—that is, not formally, and by name,—and might be doubtful of the king's intentions to them. For the house of Saul was of their tribe. And with them came also Ziba,

that servant of Saul, and steward of his lame son, Mephibosheth; who succoured David when he was leaving Jerusalem. It was certainly politic in Shimei to come in company of such a one as Ziba, though Ziba himself had been far from being disinterested in his action. Ziba brought his fifteen sons and twenty servants with him and they escorted the king over Jordan. (It is curiously stated that there was a *ferry boat* to carry over the king's household, the only time such a thing as a boat is mentioned in connection with the river Jordan.) But to those who have seen the river, the mention of a ferry boat seems very natural.

Shimei, on meeting David, fell prostrate before him, (what a contrast to the day when he threw stones and cursed) confessed his perverseness and his sin, and begged the king *not to take it to heart*; and, as an earnest of repentance, he had come, he said, *the first of the house of Joseph to meet the king*. It is very curious that he calls himself of the house of Joseph, while the previous narrative described him as of the house of Saul, who was, of course, a Benjamite.

It is probable that he was confused and perturbed at the presence of the king, so perturbed as to say Joseph, instead of Benjamin—a natural sort of mistake for a man to make whose very life was trembling in the balance. For, indeed, it was Abishai, the brother of Joab, a warm-hearted man, who had, when Shimei was cursing on the hill, risen up indignantly and begged permission to go and *take off his head*. (Chap. XVI. 9.) Abishai now puts in his word, very naturally, saying, *Shall not Shimei be put to death for this, because he hath cursed the Lord's anointed?* He significantly says "*the Lord's anointed*," to show that Shimei's action was an insult to God, and not to David only.

But David would not hear of it. No, No, he says, stand aside, ye sons of Zeruiah (he had had reason to say that before), *Ye would be adversaries to me, Shall there a man be put to death this day in Israel? Do I not know that I am king in Israel?* (v. 22.)

It was no day for retribution, but for reconciliation. Let the whole land be at peace. Then to Shimei he said, *Thou*

shalt not die, evidently meaning, thou shalt not be punished at present. For we shall hear of Shimei again.

David passes on, and now comes Mephibosheth, in the fullness of his joy to meet the king. He had shown his grief by continued humiliation, as in a day of calamity, *neither dressing his feet nor trimming his beard, nor washing his clothes from the day the king departed till the day he came again in peace*. But David had heard the lying story of the steward Ziba, and had believed it, for it did not seem improbable at the time. He therefore receives Mephibosheth somewhat coldly: *Wherefore went thou not with me, Mephibosheth?* he asks rather sarcastically; but the cripple answers, honestly and fairly no doubt, *My servant deceived me; I did say I will saddle me an ass and go to the king. He hath slandered me!* No doubt he had, and had got his reward, in a grant of all that appertained to his master, another instance of the king's rash action under the impulse of excited feeling during this rebellion. But truly it was a time to try any man's soul. As Mephibosheth went on with his artless story, the king evidently repented of his rashness in depriving the young man of his land. Yet here was Ziba himself, who had twice given proof of loyalty. He therefore cut the matter short by a compromise (not the most dignified or kingly proceeding but he evidently desired above all things to avoid any disturbance at such a time,) and decreed that Ziba should retain one-half of what had been allotted to him, and give over the other to Mephibosheth. On hearing this the young cripple generously said, *Yea, let him take all; I care not, now that the king has come back to his own house in peace!* For it was in the king's house that he had a place to live. There might be a touch of natural pride in this; he would have all his right or none.

Finally, we have again that old loyal chief, Barzillai, who comes down from his home in Gilead all the way to the Jordan to conduct the king over; *a very great man* (v. 32), as he is called in the story, whom the king presses to come and live with him in Jerusalem. The reply of the old man is very characteristic, very true to life and nature as we know it. He begged the king to excuse him. *I am an old man, he pleaded, four score*

years have passed over my head. Can I discern between good and evil ? Can I taste what I eat and drink ? Can I hear any more the voice of singing men or singing women ? I should only be a burden to my lord the king. (v. 35.) A true gentleman, this, of what we would now call the old school. And we can fancy this old white-haired patriarch, not so feeble as he fancies himself, but straight and tall and comely, and carrying his four score years well, but knowing, as by a sure instinct that the life of a palace will be no life for him.* But the old man had sons. One of these, Chimham, might go ; and might serve the king in Jerusalem. Let him go, but let *thy servant turn back again*, that I may die in mine own city, and *be buried by the grave of my father and my mother*. Here comes out that strong family affection which was one of the great characteristics of the Hebrew race, which the whole Mosaic legislation was intended to foster, and which is the true foundation of all things good and beneficial in the state.

The conservation of the *Family* is the Divine idea, in opposition to which we have the idea of the wise of this world, as in the Republic of Plato ; and various schemes of non-Christian philosophers of modern times, all which have come to nought as schemes, but have left their baleful influence operatives in that undermining of the idea of the sacredness of the marriage bond, and of the family relation which is so sadly prevalent in some countries at the present day.

David then passes over Jordan ; a great and joyful occasion, and calculated to unite the whole nation in rejoicing ; and thanksgiving. But there were jealousies between the tribes smouldering and apparently ever ready to break out. And they broke out sadly enough now. The men of Judah were a unit in conducting the king back, and doubtless the tribe of Benjamin was with Judah at first as we may learn from what was said by the other tribes. But only *half of the men of Israel*, (the rest of the tribes,) joined in the great procession, and, on arriving at Jerusalem all Israel joined in

*We have a counterpart of this in the portrait drawn by Sir Walter Scott of the old cavalier, Sir Henry Lee, on the return of Charles the Second.

a sharp remonstrance and protest. Certainly a very unreasonable one; but when was jealousy either in individuals or communities, reasonable? They said to the king, *Why have our brethren, the men of Judah, stolen thee away and have brought the king over Jordan?* A most unreasonable complaint, for half of them at any rate, took an active part in it. The men of Judah replied, with some heat, *Because the king is near of kin to us. Why then are ye angry?* Not a very judicious reply, for it implied that Judah was exalted above the rest of the tribes in having a closer relation to the king, and this naturally provoked the retort, *We have ten parts in the king; we are ten tribes against two, thus asserting, what they had clearly a right to do, that the king belonged to them all. Why then, they go on, did ye despise us, that our advice should not be taken in bringing the king back.* (v. 41, 48.) A true picture of such quarrels as arise, in these times, between political parties. And the quarrel went on. More and more bitter words were spoken, and, as the narrative states, *the words of the men of Judah were fiercer than the words of the men of Israel*, during which quarrel Benjamin was apparently drawn off to the side of the majority. And, though peace was restored later on, we can see here, only too plainly, a foreshadowing and beginning of the great division of the nation which came to pass with such disastrous effect in the reign of David's grandson, Rehoboam. And thus David's terrible sin, though pardoned spiritually, went on and on, bearing bitter fruit to his family and tribe, and also to the whole nation.

CHAPTER XV.

MORE TROUBLES TO DAVID.—THE RISING OF ISRAEL.—THE
VENGEANCE OF GIBEON AGAINST THE HOUSE OF SAUL.

(II Samuel, Chapters 20, 21; also I Chronicles, 21.)

It seems as we read the experience of David, as if his life was to reflect, as in a mirror, all the various troubles that ever afflict humanity. We have seen them, as they have passed before us, as in a panorama, unfolding one after another, as time passed on, and have perhaps, wondered whether there would ever arrive, in his chequered career, a time of rest and peace. There was an approach to such a time when he was about to rest victorious over all his enemies, having subdued them round about. But the clouds of trouble soon gathered more darkly about him than ever, and this through his own outrageous sin both against God and man in the affair of Bathsheba. Then came, as we have seen, the horrible developments of wickedness in his own family circle, and after that the unnatural rebellion of Abalom. We have been gazing almost breathless, as one scene after another of that strange drama unfolded, and now that it is ended, one might surely expect there would be an end of calamities. For David is now becoming an old man. We cannot follow his years with accuracy, for it is characteristic of Scripture narrative to pay little or no attention as a rule to chronology or the exact course of years. But the events that have transpired from time to time, and particularly the references to the children of his sons, show plainly that at this time he must have been between sixty and seventy years of age. And surely, after all his troubles, he might now look for a quiet old age.

But it was not to be. God, who ordereth all things well, had doubtless fore-ordained all these troubles; and it is plain to us that they were overruled, as even that dreadful fall was overruled, to the highest ends, and this for all time

to come. As we look on, therefore, and see other cloudy and dark days transpiring, let us think of Him who can bring light out of darkness, and make the wrath of man praise Him. Nay, who can overrule even the sins of his servants, as we have abundantly proved from these narratives, to the praise of His glory, and the guidance of His people.

THE REVOLT OF THE TRIBES UNDER SHEBA.

The rebellion of Absalom was no sooner put down than a new and most audacious revolt took place, evidently arising out of the dissensions between Israel and Judah, referred to in the last chapter. *The words of Judah were fiercer than the words of the men of Israel*; and the firconess of Judah prevailed. So far as words were concerned, the quarrel came to an end. But the men of Israel went away from Jerusalem angry and dissatisfied, and it is noticeable that no demonstration of rejoicing, no repairing to the Tabernacle, no offering of sacrifices or tokens of thanksgiving took place on the king's return. These wretched dissensions were sufficient to account for it.

The dissatisfaction came to a head in the action of a man of Benjamin, singular to say; for Benjamin generally acted with Judah, as in the great break-up under Rehoboam. But now a man of Benjamin headed another revolt; *blowing the trumpet*, and raising the cry: *We have no part in David, neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse; every man to his tents, O Israel* (v. 1). In these very words were the cry of rebellion afterwards raised in the reign of Rehoboam; and, let us remember, the rebellion was against God, whose anointed one David was, with promise to his descendants also. And, although this Benjamite was an unknown man, so strong was the feeling against Judah that they rallied to his standard.

David rose to the occasion vigorously, and, acting on his promise, he put the command of the army into the hands of Amasa, a step which led to another of those treacherous deeds of blood that have disgraced the name of Joab. For Joab, and Abishai his brother, were of course with the army, which, under the direction of the king, made a rapid pursuit of the rebel host. They had not proceeded more than a day's

march from Jerusalem, when Joab, pretending to inquire after Amasa's health in the friendly terms: *Art thou in health my brother, and taking him by the beard to kiss him, treacherously stabbed him*, (v. 9, 10) and left him wallowing in his blood, dead on the ground. Thus for the second time was this man guilty of a deliberate and treacherous murder. Yet was he never brought to justice. David, with all his power, was afraid to do it. Indeed, we may almost wonder that Joab did not murder the king himself,—for it was the king, and not Amasa, who had done him wrong by deposing him from the chief command. But retribution did overtake him at last, yet in a way one could have wished otherwise. For on his deathbed, David, in a few closing words to Solomon, gave a charge that Joab should not be suffered to go down to his grave in peace. Of this we shall learn hereafter.

Meanwhile, Joab and the army under him pursued after the rebel Sheba, who seems to have been a man of no military ability, bold as he was in instigating revolt. He retreated steadily northward, never offering battle, and at last shut himself and the small number that adhered to him in a small walled city, in the very farthest corner of the land, immediately under the shadow of Mount Lebanon. To this city, Joab, who had closely followed him, laid regular siege, and, as we read *battered the wall*; for there had long been walled cities in the land, and also means of battering them down. And here we read of a curious incident. A woman of the city who calls herself, and probably was, *a mother in Israel*, and who is called in the narrative *a wise woman*, takes the lead in a negotiation with Joab. Of such women ancient history makes record here and there; and this is one of them, refuting the foolish notion sometimes put forth in these days, that the women of Scripture were held of no more account than the women of Mohammedan countries. This wise and strong woman sees plainly that Joab must take the city, and knowing that the rebel chief and his men had no part nor lot in it, she seeks an interview with Joab. The interview was granted and the siege stopped while it took place. What she said was this: *They were wont in old time to say, ask counsel at Abel* (the name of the city was Abel Beth Maachah, and apparently some oracle was sup-

posed to be there, perhaps this wise woman herself), now I am one of them that are peaceable and faithful in Israel. Thou, Joab, seekest to destroy a city and a mother in Israel; but why wilt thou swallow up the inheritance of the Lord? (v. 18, 19.) This wise woman saw plainly enough, what apparently the chief men of the city failed to see, or if they saw they were afraid to do anything against the occupying rebel army,—that it was useless to resist; that the city was being besieged and the lives of men and women endangered for no cause of theirs—that they had no interest in this rebel chieftain. Why, then, should the city be damaged for his sake? And the woman reasoned well, and proved her wisdom by what she said and did.

Joab answered that he had no evil design against the city; he had no wish to swallow up or destroy it. All he wanted was that this rebel who had lifted up his hand against the king should be delivered up. *Deliver him up and I will depart from the city*, he says. The woman answers with great boldness, *Behold his head shall be thrown to thee over the wall*, and she had influence enough with the people, in her wisdom to get it done. Then Joab retired with his army, and the woman saved the city. Pity that this woman's name is not given, for she undoubtedly deserves to be ranked amongst the roll of patriotic and faithful women who rendered at times such eminent service to the country. This wise woman of Abel Beth Maachah may be ranked with Deborah who roused up Israel against the oppression of Sisera.

THE EXECUTION OF SAUL'S SONS.—CHAP. XXI.

The contents of the following chapter have given much occasion for the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme; for they seem to represent the All-wise and All-just as a vindictive and cruel despot and David himself as taking part in what, at first sight, seems a terrible deed of blood. But careful attention will, as is always the case with regard to narratives like this, put the matter in a different light.

The story derives interest from an exhibition of motherly tenderness and devotion on the part of the woman of heart of anyone with a spark of humanity. Her goodness has been put in much to his disadvantage.

The narrative is as follows (chap. xxi.):—

Sometime in David's reign—most likely in the earlier part of it,—(for events are often related in Scripture out of the order of time), there was a famine or rather a scarcity, doubtless from drought, for three successive years. David *enquires of the Lord*, and he did wisely in so enquiring, and the Lord answered, *It is for Saul and for his bloody house because he slew the Gibeonites*. (These, it will be remembered, were a Canaanitish tribe, who had procured safety by guile from Joshua, and had lived in peace in the midst of Israel for many generations. But Saul had sought to slay them in his zeal for the tribes of Israel.) David, upon this sends for the Gibeonites, tells them of the Lord's answer, and enquires of them what he should do to make atonement for Saul's massacre. (One wonders, by the way, why he did not enquire about this of the Lord, too. He might have received direction of a different kind from that suggested to him by the people of Gibeon.) The first thing these people said, in answer, was that they would take no money as an atonement, a highly honorable feeling on their part. Money as a satisfaction for blood is not to be thought of. Nor would they have as satisfaction, the life of any man in Israel, save the lives of seven of the sons of Saul, the man, they said, who devised their destruction. (The word sons, let us remember, often includes descendants.) These seven were sought out, two being his sons by his concubine Rizpah, and five his grandsons.* They were delivered to the Gibeonites, who hanged them all on the hill of Gibeah of Saul, and allowed the bodies to remain exposed, a terrible deed of retribution. And now comes the pathetic part of the story. The mother of the two sons of Saul, Rizpah, the daughter of Aiah, was heart-broken at the execution of her sons, and *took sackcloth and spread it for her upon the rock, from the beginning of harvest until water dropped upon them out of heaven, and suffered neither the birds of the air (the vul-*

*There is an obscurity in the text here (Chap. xxi : v. 8) which is corrected in other Hebrew versions, and is put right in the margin of our own Revised translation. The name Michal should be Merab, as is evident from (1 Samuel xviii : 19.)

tures who always flew to devour the exposed dead,) *to rest on them by day, nor the beasts of the field by night.* This pathetic watch was only ended *when the rain fell from heaven.* How long it lasted we are not told, but short or long, for few days or many, the watch was most touching; and has formed a subject for painters, who have depicted the vultures hovering around towards nightfall and beasts of prey gathering round, while this heart-broken mother kept her sleepless watch on her bed of sackcloth on the rock.

And some have made it an occasion of reviling against David as yielding up innocent men to appease a murderous blood feud and even of blasphemy against God, for approving of the desire of the Gibeonites for vengeance.

But let the matter be calmly considered. And, first, it is apparent that there had been some slaughter of the Gibeonites of the nature of an unprovoked massacre, which, though not recorded in the chronicle of Saul's life, did undoubtedly take place. What Saul was capable of in that direction we know only too well from his wanton massacre of God's priests at Nob. (1 Sam. XXII. 19.) Next we may gather that some of Saul's sons and other members of his family *took part in that massacre.* The anger of the Lord was against Saul and his bloody house! (v. 1.) And further, though the narrative does not say so expressly, there is every probability that the seven men who were yielded up by the king, were amongst those guilty of this massacre, and that this was the reason why he delivered them up. For David, in spite of two great faults, was not a cruel man, but the contrary; nor was he likely to be unjust in punishing the innocent for the guilty. It was *Saul's bloody house* that he sought out for punishment; and the punishment was inflicted by the men who had suffered the wrong. And though our sympathies must go out to the unfortunate mother—we must remember that there were other unfortunate mothers of Gibeon, and many of them, who had had to bewail their sons slain in the ruthless massacre of Saul. We may be very sure that the Judge of all the earth did right in requiring the murderers to be punished, and that David did what he thought was right in choosing out the men.

David, upon this, again showed respect to the memory of Saul, as one who had been the anointed king. The men of Jabesh Gilead had given proof of their gratitude to Saul by their memorable night expedition to Bethshan, when they took down the bodies of Saul and Jonathan from the wall and gave their bones honorable burial. And now as a last final act of respect to Saul's memory, David orders that these bones be transported from Jabesh Gilead to the family sepulchre in Benjamin, and there interred along with the bones of the men who had suffered execution. And again, we are told, *God was entreated for the land*. Through all this, though we may not understand the whole circumstances, there does shine that great principle of regard for human life and retribution for taking it, which was so plainly enunciated when the world began its fresh career after the flood, and the law was laid down. *Surely your blood and your lives will I require, at the hand of every beast will I require it, and at the hand of man.* (Gen. IX, 5.)

CHAPTER XVI.

DAVID'S NUMBERING OF THE PEOPLE.

(1 Chron. XXI.)

Tracing out events in their natural order—for there is a natural sequence in these events of Scripture history, as there is in other histories, there appears to be a clear connection between the suppression of Absalom's rebellion and the rising of Sheba the Benjamite, and this temptation to make a military census of the people. It is clear that David's object was to ascertain with accuracy what was the military strength of his kingdom. Very probably he was thinking of the possibility of another outbreak. But the great adversary of souls, going watchfully about, who had tempted David once before, with disastrous consequences, now sees another opening for temptation in these anxious thoughts of the king. These anxious thoughts; the very anxiety betrays a forgetfulness of God, of whom he had so often sung when full of the Holy Ghost; as a *sure defense, a strong tower, a shield*, in whose presence he *would not be afraid of ten thousands of people round about.* (Psalm III.) All experience shows that a desponding frame of mind, no matter from what cause,—it may be even bodily sickness, affords a favorable vantage ground for the entrance of temptation. It gives the great adversary his opportunity, for it is a sure symptom of the absence of faith in God. Faith in God dispels despondency, and lifts up the soul from dejection of spirit, even when low spirits, to use a modern phrase, arise from sickness or a low condition of bodily health.

It was with a clear perception of this that a famous leader of the Roman Church, no less than the founder of the Jesuit order, put forth as a maxim for guidance to his followers, 'Never determine upon any important step in moments of despondency.' Ignatius Loyola had a good deal of spiritual insight in some things, blind as he was in others,

and he understood perfectly what has been here asserted, that despondency in a child of God, is often a symptom of the absence of faith, and leaves an open door to temptation.

In the case of David, it is certain that his project of a military census arose from the absence of faith in God. And this was seen even by such a man as Joab, about the last man, we would think, to concern himself about it. But he did concern himself. He remonstrated strenuously ; reminding the king that the matter was in the hands of the Lord ; that all the people were now loyal. *Are they not all my lord's servants*, he said, and warning the king that taking a military census would be a *trespass*, a sin against God, and would be a cause of damage to the whole kingdom. In this, for once, Joab spoke well.

But the king's heart was set upon the enrolment. Satan, the arch-deceiver, had blinded his eyes. As is usual in temptation, the king only looked at the present advantages and judged the matter from an earthly point of view, forgetting higher considerations. He ought to have said, in response to the temptation, I cannot do this. It would be a sin against God ; an act of unfaithfulness to Him who has raised me from a shepherd to a king. For let us bear in mind that it was to his faith in God that he owed all his elevation. He was God's anointed. And to act as if he had no God to trust in, was little better than treason.

So, under this subtle and terrible temptation, he persevered in his determination and had the census taken. This, let us bear in mind, was simply a military census. It was a numbering of the men able to bear arms. It had nothing to do with the civil life of the people ; with the total number of the population, with the amount of the crops, or the productiveness of the soil, or with education, or as to whether all came to Jerusalem at the appointed feasts. It was simply to get an answer to the question, What is the fighting power of the kingdom. It ignored God.

And God was highly displeased, and spoke by the prophet Gad, (not Nathan, as before,) offering the king a choice of three terrible alternatives, any one of which would immensely diminish the fighting power of the kingdom, and

demonstrate the folly of leaving the Lord of Hosts out of account. *Three years' famine, three months of defeat by enemies, three days' pestilence*; all were terrible to contemplate, but the second was the worst. David was now utterly overwhelmed. He dare not choose. *I am in a great strait*, he said. But he did wisely in this terrible emergency. *Let me fall into the hand of the Lord, and not into the hand of man!* (v. 13) he says; and the saying is worthy of his better self. For this is the language of faith once more; and no man needs to rise higher or go beyond it. In the darkest hour, in the most terrible conjunction of circumstances, when a Christian man is tempted to say, *All things are against me*; if he can really say, *Let me now fall into the hands of the Lord*; he will have peace.

The Lord answered David's faith by decreeing the lightest of the three terrible judgments, viz., the pestilence. Severe as the judgment was, for it swept off, it is said, seventy thousand men, but it may possibly have been only seven (see later on), this was far preferable to the wearing away of successive years of famine, and still more to the horror and national humiliation of defeat by a victorious enemy.

The pestilence swept nearly over the whole land, but when it was about to descend upon Jerusalem, and apparently before the three days were expired, David saw, in vision, *the Destroying Angel with a drawn sword stretched out over Jerusalem*; the elders of the city, clothed in sackcloth, being with him. Then David and the elders fell upon their faces, and the king cried out, in an agony of grief: *Is it not I that commanded the people to be numbered? It is I that have sinned, but these sheep!* (here he remembers his character of shepherd of his people,) *What have they done?* And then he prays that he, and *he and his house alone*, may be punished. (v. 17.)

The Angel of Destruction was standing, so the vision ran, over a spot that has been most memorable ever since, viz., over the high, and now levelled plateau to the East of the old City of David and separated from it by the deep ravine, afterwards called the Tyropean Valley. That rocky plateau was then used by a Jebusite farmer as a threshing floor, and

eminently suited it was for the purpose being high and exposed to every wind that blew. The Angel spake to David by the prophet commanding him to *set up an altar* on the spot, that the plague might be stayed. This spot, this high plateau, thus consecrated by the erection of an altar of atonement and reconciliation, is connected with all the subsequent history of the Hebrew people, for it has never ceased to be a sacred site, and is venerated as such even in these very times. For it was on this rocky plateau that there rose not long after, the most celebrated Temple the world has ever seen; even the Temple of Solomon; replaced, after an interval of desolation, by another on the same spot, and that by another still, the glory of which surpassed the others in that the Lord of Glory Himself trod its courts. And when this in turn was destroyed in the storm and fire of the dreadful siege of the Roman conqueror Titus; after a long interval, another sacred building arose on the same site, built first for a Christian Church, but perverted after a time to the use of the devotees of the false prophet, which, building, now called the Mosque of Omar, still stands on that same plateau, very magnificent and beautiful, the most prominent object in any view of Jerusalem.

Thus does this incident of the sin, the judgment, the atonement of the altar, the staying of the plague, the permanent consecration of the spot, connect past times with the present, and enable us, now looking on this spot, in mental vision, almost to see the Angel of Destruction sheathing his sword, as the altar of atonement rises, and the blood of reconciliation is shed, the smoke of sacrifice ascending to heaven and the Lord answering by fire. The account of the acquisition of this piece of ground by the king is most interesting and creditable on both sides. When the owner of the plateau, called *Ornan* in one narrative and *Araunah* in the other (both having a similar sound) knew that the king wanted it for the purpose of erecting an altar, he offered the ground as a present; and offered also the oxen and the wood for the sacrifice. All these, as the narrative states, did *Araunah, as a king*, i.e., in a kingly manner, give unto the king, and he added the wish of benediction, *The Lord thy God accept thee*, all which reflects the character of an emin-

ently good man. Surely, though a Canaanite by blood, he was an Israelite in faith. :

The king, for his part, is equally good and gracious. He refuses the gift and insists on paying the full value of the land, saying, what is true for all time and circumstances, *I will not offer burnt offerings to the Lord of that which cost me nothing !* (v. 24.)

Thus, then, this piece of ground was acquired, wholly for a sacred purpose. And to sacred uses it has been devoted ever since.*

*It is worth noting, in this connection, as a fact of high interest, that in the very centre of the Mosque of Omar is a rough platform of the original rock of the old threshing floor of Araunah, which it is almost certain was the place on which the altar stood that David erected, as well as the great altar of Solomon's Temple, and of the Temple which succeeded it. Of all the sacred sites of the city this has the surest evidence of certainty.

CRITICAL NOTES ON THE PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

I.—AS TO DIVINE WAYS AND JUDGMENTS.

One cannot but be struck, in considering the events of the life of David, with the extraordinary severity of the calamities which befel the land as following upon the judgments of God. Three successive years of famine over the whole land, for the slaughter of the Gibeonites by Saul and his house, seems to our understanding a punishment terribly disproportioned to the offence, especially when we think of the suffering of the second and third years. For why should the whole land suffer in judgment for the offence of one family, even if that was the family of the late king. Still more does the severity of the judgment strike us which followed the military census of David. For a pestilence to sweep over the land, and carry off *seventy thousand people* in less than three days does seem an extraordinary penalty to be inflicted for an act like that of taking this census, highly reprehensible though it was. But looking at these things, what can we say? What can we do, in all reason, but hold our peace and confess that we do not understand. We can judge the conduct of the *men* of these ancient times, for we can compare them with men whom we have known in these modern days. And we can see how very *human* these men of Scripture history are; how they are certainly *men of like passions*, purposes, temptations and weaknesses with ourselves. Our measuring line of judgment is fully sufficient for the consideration of the ways of men. But when we apply our measuring line to the consideration of the ways of God we must soon be conscious of its utter inefficiency. We are out of our depth. We have nothing to which the ways of God can be compared. As has been before observed in these studies, the young child of a Prime Minister of England or a President of the United States, just old enough to talk and observe, is as competent to judge of some great

operation of state in war or peace, as we are, even the wisest of us, to judge the ways of the great Ruler of the Universe. For to Him are present the issues of all actions, both present and future, and the whole area affected is spread out as in a map before him. While for us all that is known is but a mere moment of the present, and merest speck of the issues and consequences of any action, stated to have been the action of the Lord. And the more we ponder, the deeper will be our conviction that it is vain for any man to attempt to sound with his small plummet the depth of the Divine Counsels, and that the path of true wisdom is to be silent, and to understand that the *deep things of God are past finding out*. (Rom. XI, 33.) What was felt by Job, by David, by Isaiah, in the old dispensation is thus repeated in the new. Many things we see *through a glass, darkly*. But a time is revealed as coming when *we shall know even as we are known*. (I Cor. XIII, 12.)

This much, however, of Divine procedure we can judge of, for we have a measure of comparison in the affairs of modern times. God, we are told, brought calamities upon the whole people for the fault of the king, which has an aspect of injustice. But this is exactly what takes place in modern times. When kings or statesmen do wrong and make mistakes in their official capacity, it is the whole people that suffer. If they do wrong as private individuals, they alone, or they and their house, bear the consequences. But if they blunder as statesmen, every man and every family in the land is injured. This is the inevitable consequence of all conditions of life where one man, or a small number of men, have to act on behalf of the whole people.

Now for David's personal sin in the matter of Bathsheba, he and his house were mainly punished. But in the matter of Saul and the Gibeonites, and in that of David's numbering the people, the action in both cases was official, done by both Saul and David as *king*. The punishment therefore affected the whole nation.

II.—AS TO DISCREPANCIES IN NUMBERS AND OTHERWISE IN THE
NARRATIVES AS GIVEN IN II SAMUEL AND I CHRONICLES.

The foregoing considerations need not prevent our considering the question, whether the number given of those who died by pestilence, viz., seventy thousand, has been transcribed correctly. For in the original record it may have been only seven. It has already been pointed out that while errors in statements of fact are easily perceived and corrected in transcription, errors in numbers are exceedingly difficult to prevent; difficult even in these times, as all know well who have to do with the printing of numbers. It would have required almost a constant miracle to prevent errors of numbers from creeping into the text of the Old Testament, but such a miracle is no where promised, and, in fact, was never bestowed. It need not surprise us therefore, if errors and discrepancies are to be found in respect of numbers in Bible narratives. The original record had neither errors nor discrepancies; but these have crept in during the long course of transcriptions by hand.

Thus, for example, in the second book of Samuel (Chap. XXIV, 13) the years of famine are stated to be *seven*, while in the first book of Chronicles (XXI, 12) the number is given as *three*. But the sign in Hebrew characters for seven is so like that for three, that nothing would be easier than for a mistake to be made by a transcriber. Again, as to the result of the military census, the book of Samuel gives the numbers as eight hundred thousand men in Israel, and five hundred thousand in Judah. But in the book of Chronicles the numbers are given as eleven hundred thousand men in Israel and four hundred and seventy thousand men in Judah. Here again there is a considerable difference. But it is to be observed that in neither case are *exact* figures given, but approximate figures only, what we now call 'round' numbers, such as are constantly given in speaking of the armies of modern times. Thus, speaking of Waterloo, an historian might say that Napoleon had 80,000 men under him, whereas the exact number might be 83,756, or 77,933. And, as illustrating the difficulty of accuracy in the statement of numbers, it is well known that there have been

great disputes as to the exact numbers engaged in that battle both on the English side and the French. But exactness of statement as to numbers has no bearing on the great fact of the issue of the engagement, viz., that Napoleon was defeated so effectually that his power was finally overthrown. Even so it is with these numbers of Scripture. Exactness of statement as to numbers has no bearing whatever on the substance of the narrative. Thus, for example, as to the numbers that came out of Egypt, which are given as six hundred thousand men besides children. That word six might be three, without affecting the great truth that God brought the people out of Egypt with a mighty hand, and fed them during all their journey through the wilderness. And as to the results of the census of David, it is obvious that it does not affect the substance of the matter in the slightest degree whether the "round" figures given in the book of Samuel or in the book of Chronicles are the nearest to the exact sum.

There is, however, another discrepancy between the two narratives which is of substantial importance. For the narrative in the book of Samuel (Chap. XXIV, 1) states that the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and that he moved David against them to say, Go, number Israel and Judah. The wording is peculiar, but the statement apparently is that David was moved by the Lord to commit this most grievous sin. A strange statement indeed, and one may well stumble at it.

But the book of Chronicles (chap. xxi. 1) states it altogether differently, viz., that SATAN stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel!

Now, as between the two narratives, there cannot be the shadow of doubt as to which is correct. For the last is in harmony with all that is revealed both of the Divine Being and of Satan, while the first is utterly and absolutely contrary to it. The statement that God moved David to commit a great sin is inconceivable,—what philosophers call, *un-thinkable*, while the statement that Satan provoked him to do it, is in harmony with all that we know of the great adversary. Long afterwards the truth was enunciated explicitly by the Apostle James. Not that it was new, but as expressing what was well known, that *God tempteth no man,*

(James I. 13.) For it is utterly impossible that he should. Every reasonable, thinking mind will acquiesce in this.

But this being so, what are we to make of the statement in the book of Samuel ? Reason as we may, and puzzle ourselves till we are lost in a maze, the only rational explanation is that the verse is one of those very rare instances where the error of a transcriber affects the substance of the matter narrated. The verse, as originally written, doubtless was, that the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and (not *he*, but) Satan, moved David against them. The alteration of one word is sufficient, and there cannot be a shadow of doubt that the right word there is SATAN.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE DESIGNATION OF SOLOMON TO BE KING.—THE PREPARATION
FOR THE GREAT TEMPLE.—THE REVOLT OF ADONIJAH.

(I Chronicles, 22 to 29 ; I Kings, 1.)

The last days of David are full of as varied incidents, of chequered events, and of manifestations both Divine and human, as any that are recorded of his marvellous career. He himself was a man of an extraordinary diversity of character and power, and what was said of a statesman of modern times might well have been said of him,

A man so various, that he seemed to be,
Not one, but all mankind's epitome.

And these diverse faculties stand out prominently in his closing years. For in these his last days he does things that are inspired by the noblest patriotism, and gives utterance to some of the grandest strains of devotion that ever fell from human lips. Yet, along with all this, there are thoughts and purposes, as given in charge to his son Solomon, which are altogether on a simply human plane, and relate to such an administration of justice as might be common to any magistracy of modern times when handing on the burden of his office to a successor.

Indeed, the charge given by the dying king to his successor with respect to Joab and Shimei, has an appearance of personal revenge that has caused a certain amount of misgiving and stumbling. But a careful consideration will show that both are magisterial acts, and not personal, as is fully opened up in the next chapter.

But now, not to anticipate too much, let us pass to the consideration of preparations for the building of the Temple.

The design of building a permanent structure to replace

the Tent which had so long served the purpose of Divine celebrations had, as has been seen, been before the mind of the king long before his grievous fall into sin, and its long train of disastrous consequences. At that time his purpose was to build such a Temple himself. But the project met with the marked disapproval of God, mainly on the ground that David had been a man of war and blood.

But many years had elapsed, some twenty or thirty apparently ; for it is impossible to tell accurately. And now David was come to a good old age. The last of the many wars, famines, and troubles of his chequered life, was over, and, in a very remarkable way, a site had come into his possession that was perfectly adapted to the purpose. For we cannot but see a Divine intention and indication in the fact of the Destroying Angel staying his hand on that very spot, for in all the land there was not a piece of ground more suited for the purpose. The area of the plateau was amply sufficient, as anyone looking at a map of Jerusalem may see ; being about fifteen hundred feet long, by about three hundred feet wide, overlooking on the east the deep and romantic valley of Jehoshaphat, on the south the rocky defile of Hinnom, and on the west being separated from the city of David by the deep Tyropean valley, now almost filled up by the debris of twenty-five centuries.

It rose, therefore, from these valleys like a separate eminence, a noble site indeed, perhaps unequalled in the world, hardly even by the noble plateau on which stood the Temple of Minerva at Athens, called the Parthenon, the ruins of which dominate the modern city still. And it is evident that as soon as the sacrifice of reconciliation and thanksgiving was offered up by the king on the threshing floor of Araunah, when the Lord answered him by fire, the idea took root in David's mind that this was the place for the permanent temple. It is not expressly stated that this was of Divine appointment ; but it is highly probable that it was ; At any rate, we read (Chap. XXII) that as soon as the sacrifice had been accepted, and the plague stayed, *David said, This is the dwelling place of the Lord God ; and this is the altar of burnt offering for Israel.* And then, without further delay, he commenced making preparation, of his own proper means (chap. xxix.) of the masses of material re-

quired. After a time the king gathered the *whole congregation* of the people together, (let us notice that it was the whole congregation of the people whom he invited (Chap. 29) indicating clearly a desire that all the people,—the poor as well as the rich, should have some part in the work,) and made a solemn appeal that they should consecrate their service, in this direction, to the Lord. And he commences this appeal, as was most wise, by stating that he had himself prepared gold, silver and precious stones, of *his own proper good*, that is, of his own private resources, and not out of public funds,—preparing, as he says, *with all his might*, for the building. Thus he could appeal with confidence that they should follow his lead and imitate his example.

For throughout all this work of preparation, which strikes us with a sort of wonder at its vastness, variety, completeness, and costliness,—there is not a single reference to taxation, or to a levy, or to the employment of public funds. As it was with the Tabernacle, so here, the whole of the rare and costly materials were gathered by the free-will offerings of the people, asked for, not as a favor to the king, but as a *consecrated offering of service to the Lord*.

After the Temple was built in the reign of Solomon it would appear that serious burdens were laid upon the people, for the purpose of erecting great palaces, public buildings, and reservoirs, for laying out gardens, and what not. But for the building of the Temple nothing was taken ; no tax was levied ; all was the fruit of voluntary consecration.

But from the very beginning of the work the young prince Solomon was associated with it. And this is the first time that his name is mentioned in the history since the day of his birth. What Solomon was as a young man, we learn from the subsequent history, from which it appears that there was good reason why an elder half brother of his should be passed by, and this young man, Solomon, nominated by his father to succeed to the throne. Nominated, for let us bear in mind that only a Divine choice, made manifest by priestly anointing, could confer a valid title.

David, then, having received a Divine monition that Solomon was the most fit, amongst his sons to succeed him, (I Chron. XXVIII, 5,) calls for him, and gives him, in the

very first place, a charge *to build a house for the Lord*, reciting the circumstance of his own desire to do it, and of the Lord's message through the prophet, that he must not ; for that God willed that not he, but his son, should build the house.

The words that David spoke on these occasions of the charge to his son, and his appeal to the people, are most worthy of note. For they strike what should be the keynote of all such enterprises for all future time ; they enunciate great principles which are just as applicable to-day as when uttered ; and, consequently, they have been repeated, again and again, in precept and exhortation in these modern times when buildings have been erected and dedicated to God.

Now, my son, said the aged king, the Lord be with thee ; and prosper thou and build the house of the Lord thy God. Only the Lord give thee wisdom and understanding, and give thee charge concerning Israel. (1 Chron. xxii. 11.)

How these words remind us of the wise answer made by the young man, when, in a Divinely sent dream, he was asked what God should give him ! And we may well consider if it was not the wise counsel of his father that inspired the famous answer ?

Then shalt thou prosper, the king went on, if thou shalt take heed to fulfil the statutes and judgments which the Lord charged concerning Israel. Arise therefore and be doing, and the Lord be with thee ! (v. 13.)

From all which it is clear that the young prince was to take part in overseeing the preparations from the very beginning.

The king also gave the princes a charge to help the young man as a Divine duty. *Set your heart and your soul, said he, to seek the Lord your God. Arise, therefore, and build ye the sanctuary.*

It was in the midst of all these preparations that the king convened a solemn assembly at Jerusalem (chap. 28) of *the princes and the captains* of various degrees, *the stewards* of his house and possessions, *the officers*, and *mighty men*, for the purpose of designating, in their presence, his son Solomon to be his successor, which he did, standing before

them, and reciting the same thing we have heard before, of the Lord's forbidding him to build the house, and adding what he had not stated to them before, that the Lord, out of all his sons, *had chosen Solomon* as the one to sit on the throne of the kingdom ; and that he, Solomon, should build the house and courts of the Lord.

Then, in the sight of all Israel, he gives this solemn public charge to his son, as he had before charged him privately: *And thou, Solomon, my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve him with a perfect heart, and with a willing mind, for the Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts. If thou seek him he will be found of thee; but if thou forsake him he will cast thee off for ever. Take heed, now. Be strong and do it.* (v. 9, 10.)

What now follows is extremely interesting, as showing not only that David had amassed the materials for the house, but that he had thought out, under Divine direction, the plan of it, and the details of the building. For he delivered into his hands, publicly, what we would call both the plan, the elevation, and the specification of every part of the manifold structure ; all which it is stated that he had, *by the Spirit*, (the Spirit of God, certainly is meant,) even as God gave to Moses on the mount, the full pattern of the Tabernacle and all its furniture, and also filled Bezaleel with the spirit of wisdom to execute it.

Thus the Spirit of God filled the mind of David as he was considering the plan of the Temple. (v. 12.)

But the Temple was immensely more than the Tabernacle had been, which was a single large tent,—large indeed as a tent,—but very small in comparison with the churches and cathedrals of Christendom.

But the Temple, as a whole, was far more than a single building for sacrifice and worship. This is plain from the description given of the plan. Thus, (Chap. 28, v. 11.) *David gave to Solomon the pattern of the PORCH, and the HOUSES thereof, and of the TREASURIES, and the Upper Chambers thereof, and the INNER PARLORS* (as well as the place of the Mercy Seat,) also of the COURTS OF THE HOUSE and all the Chambers round about. The Temple, then, was

to have, beside the building devoted to sacrifices and offerings, large numbers of buildings round about it, evidently for the habitation of priests and levites, and also for meetings and conferences and national assemblies. It would therefore cover a large space of ground and require an extensive area for a site. All this, which was revealed to the king in vision by the spirit of God, was, as we learn from the subsequent history, actually carried out. And this helps us to understand what would otherwise be incomprehensible, why such vast quantities of materials required to be prepared. For the actual Temple itself, though much larger than the Tabernacle, was a very small building compared with our modern cathedrals, being only about 100 feet long, 33 feet broad, and 50 feet high, about one-third even of this small area being shut off for the Most Holy Place, all which shows most clearly that the Temple proper was not a place in which a congregation could gather to hear preaching either by prophet or priest. It was not even a place for a congregation to gather for worship; for none but priests could enter it. Any gathering of the congregation must of necessity have been in the outside area, in the chambers, or porches, or courts, and not in the Temple itself; a fact which shows plainly that this Temple was not a prototype of a Christian Church, and that any analogy sought to be drawn from the Temple and its services is fallacious.

The quantity of gold, silver and precious stones, accumulated and prepared is remarkable, as well as of the less costly materials, brass, iron and marble. It is difficult for us to give exact, or even approximate values to the gold, silver, and precious stones prepared; the thousands of talents of gold, and the thousand talents of silver; for no one in these times can tell what was the *weight* of the talent. Calculations have been repeatedly made, but they are all absolutely useless, and amount to nothing more than guesses. It is sufficient for us to know, (and if we knew the value of all these materials to a dollar, the knowledge would have no more practical value,) that the quantity and value were very large,—so large as to make it plain that a wonderful spirit of generosity and of love to the house of God, had been poured out both upon king and people, prompting them to

sacrifice much that might have been devoted to ornamenting their own houses or laid up in store against the emergencies of ordinary life or of war.

The spirit that animated both king and people is marvelously depicted in the 29th chapter. After describing the gifts, the narrative adds: (v. 9.)

Then the people REJOICED for that they offered willingly ; and how finely it is emphasized that with PERFECT HEART they offered willingly to the Lord ; and that David the king also rejoiced with great joy ; exemplifying the profound truth of our Saviour's saying, It is more blessed to give than to receive.

And how noble it is to see the king rising 'to the height of this great occasion, as he *blessed the Lord before all the congregation*, and said, in words of undying sublimity:

THINE, O LORD, IS THE GREATNESS, AND THE POWER, AND THE GLORY, AND THE VICTORY, AND THE MAJESTY ; for all that is in the heaven and the earth is thine ; thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and thou art exalted as head above all ! Both riches and honor come of thee, and in thine hand is power and might ; and in thine hand it is to make great and to give strength unto all. Now, therefore, our God, we thank thee and praise thy glorious name.

Then David continues, glancing at himself and his people and the honor put upon them in being able to give : (v. 14 to 19.)

But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort ? For all things come of thee, AND OF THINE OWN WE HAVE GIVEN THEE ! A profound philosophic truth that might well be better remembered than it is. And it is repeated in the words that follow:

For we are strangers before thee, and sojourners as were all our fathers ; our days on earth are as a shadow, and there is none abiding. O Lord our God, all this store that we have prepared to build thee an house for thine holy name COMETH OF THINE HAND, AND IS ALL THINE OWN !

The invocation concludes with a prayer for the people, and for Solomon:

O LORD GOD OF ABRAHAM, ISAAC, AND OF ISRAEL, OUR FATHERS, KEEP THIS FOR EVER IN THE HEARTS OF THY PEOPLE.

AND GIVE UNTO SOLOMON MY SON A PERFECT HEART TO KEEP THY COMMANDMENTS, THY TESTIMONIES, AND THY STATUTES; AND TO DO ALL THESE THINGS, *and to build the Palace, for the which I have made provision!*

Then the King said to the congregation: NOW BLESS THE LORD YOUR GOD! *And all the congregation blessed the Lord God of their fathers, . . . and worshipped the Lord and the King—a curious conjunction, one might say, but plainly an instance where the same word is used, as words often are, to express a lower and a far higher condition of the same thing.*

Naturally, this great ceremony concluded with the offering of great sacrifices on the day after, *a thousand bullocks, a thousand rams, and a thousand lambs; along with which were great festivities of a social character, for they did eat and drink before the Lord on that day with great gladness.*

After all this, there was what was equivalent to a ceremony of Coronation of Solomon. *He sat upon his father's throne, and all the princes and people, and all the sons of the King tendered loyal obedience to him.* (1 Chron. xxix. 23.)

THE REVOLT OF ADONIJAH.

(1 Kings.)

But in the order of time there should have been noticed (for it doubtless took place before all this) an uprising of an elder son of David, which rising had very important consequences.

Adonijah, a half brother of Absalom, and a man of the same disposition, *exalted himself*, somewhat as his brother had done before him, and determined to seize the succession (1 Kings i. 5)—and, strange to say, he was able to carry Joab and Abiathar, the high priest, with him. But Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, and the mighty men were not implicated in this revolt. Nathan quickly acquainted BATHSHEBA with what was going on. Bathsheba has never appeared in the story since the birth of her son Solomon,

but she impresses us now as a woman of singular prudence and wisdom. She enters the presence of the King (having first consulted the prophet Nathan), acquaints him with Adonijah's doings, appeals to the King to fulfil the solemn promise once made to her that Solomon shall succeed to the throne, *for the eyes of all Israel, she says, are upon thee, that thou shouldest tell them who shall sit on the throne of my lord the King after him* (1 Kings i. 20). Otherwise it shall come to pass when my lord the King shall sleep with his fathers, *that I and my son Solomon shall be counted offenders.*

Most sagaciously spoken, as is evident; and she might have added, then shall our lives be in jeopardy with this brother of Absalom.

Nathan the prophet comes in soon after, and adds more to what the King has heard, viz., that *Adonijah had slain oxen and fat cattle in abundance, and had got together the King's sons, also the captains of the host* (for Abishai had followed his brother Joab evidently) and *Abiathar the priest, and behold they eat and drink before him, and say, GOD SAVE KING ADONIJAH!* And he added—*Is this thing come by my lord the King?*

But this audacious conspiracy was soon nipped in the bud.

Call me Bathsheba, said the King. Then she came and stood, with all respect, before the King, and he swore solemnly to her, in the name of the Lord who had redeemed his soul out of all distress, as he had sworn to her before, that Solomon, her son, should reign after him, and sit upon his throne, in his stead. *Even so,* said he, *will I certainly do this day.* (v. 29, 30.)

And so he did. For when Bathsheba had retired, having bowed with face to the earth, and done reverence to the King, and said, with a sort of prophetic spiritual insight, *Let my Lord King David live for ever,* he called Zadok and Nathan and Benaiah before him, and ordered them to take a company of his servants, and *cause Solomon to ride upon his own mule, and bring him down to Gihon, then to blow with the trumpet and say GOD SAVE KING SOLOMON!* Then, he added, *ye shall come up after him, that he may come and*

sit upon my throne, for he shall be King in my stead. All which was duly done. These three chief men, with the household guard, known as the *Cherethites* and the *Pelethites* went out of the city in solemn procession, Solomon riding at their head on the King's mule. Then the trumpet was blown, and, what was far more significant, Zadok the priest took a horn of the sacred oil out of the Tabernacle, and anointed Solomon as king publicly, in sight of all the people.

This act was decisive.

The people acknowledged it at once. The whole multitude cried *GOD SAVE KING SOLOMON*, a band of music playing; and the shouts rent the air with a mighty acclaim so that the city rang again.

Adonijah and his adherents—rash fools that they were—were feasting and rejoicing, reckoning without their host, making sure, now that Joab and Abishai and Abiathar were with them, that they would carry the people, too; setting aside the King altogether as old and of no account. But the ominous sound of mighty shouting reaches their ears. Joab says, angrily: Wherefore is the city in an uproar? And, while he yet spake, Jonathan, the son of the priest, comes on, and is greeted gaily by the foolish Adonijah, making sure the shouts are for him. *Come in, said he, thou art a valiant man, and bringest good tidings!*

But the shouts were not for him, for the messenger quickly answered, evidently with a tremor in his tone (for every one of them had reason to fear the consequences), "*Verily our lord King David hath made Solomon King!*" He then went on to tell the whole story of the demonstration, the blowing with the trumpet, the anointing of Solomon by Zadok (what a fool must Abiathar have thought himself when he heard this), of the gathering round Solomon of the King's guard, and of Solomon sitting on the King's throne, of the welcome of the King and the shouts of the people! Dismal news, indeed (especially to Joab and Abishai, who must have cursed themselves for their folly in joining such a rash revolt,) and on hearing it the whole affair collapsed. *Every man went his way*, and the foolish upstart, Adonijah, fled to the altar in the Tabernacle for refuge. From thence

he was taken, on his submitting to Solomon, who gave him an assurance of safety so long as he should show himself a worthy man, but with a warning that if wickedness was found in him he should die.

CHAPTER XVIII.

DAVID'S LAST WORDS AND DEATH—SUMMARY OF HIS LIFE AND CHARACTER.

(2 Samuel xxiii. 1 Kings ii.)

No one can read the two accounts of the words spoken by David during the last days of his life without being struck by the remarkable difference in their character and tone. Let any one read the account in the Second Book of Samuel (chap. xxiii.), and then pass on to that in the First Book of Kings (chap. ii.), and he will find it hard to conceive, on a first consideration, that the words recorded were uttered by the same man, and especially that they were uttered by the same man at the same period of his life.

It will, however, be reasonable to take the account of the Book of Kings first, for it follows naturally upon the events that have been already commented on. And there is everything in the probability of the case that the words were spoken *before* those recorded in the Book of Samuel, although, as is frequently the case in Bible Chronicles, they appear later on in the history.

Turning then to the narrative in the Book of Kings (chap. ii.), we find in it a solemn charge given to Solomon, after the young prince had been invested with the dignity, and authority of the kingdom, and after he has *exercised* the function of sovereignty in dealing with his revolting brother. For the action recorded in the last few verses of chapter I. is evidently the action of a chief magistrate, and not a private person. The promise of protection given to Adonijah is clearly given officially by one exercising the power of the head of the State.

This being so, we can understand the real character and force of the words spoken to Solomon by his father during the days when he was drawing nigh to death. They were an official charge as to duty and responsibility spoken

by the head of the State, as chief magistrate, to ex. who was about to succeed him.

The first few words are of great weight and solemnity, indicating to Solomon what was the very foundation on which his throne was built:

"I go, said the dying King (I Kings, Chap. II., 2, 3, 4,) *the way of all the earth; be thou strong therefore, and show thyself a man*"—almost the very words spoken long before by Moses to Joshua. Be strong—but what sort of strength? Be a man—but what sort of a man? What was in the King's mind we shall find to be the same thought that was in the mind of Moses when charging Joshua, for he goes on to say:

"AND KEEP THE CHARGE OF THE LORD THY GOD, TO WALK IN HIS WAYS, TO KEEP HIS STATUTES, AND HIS COMMANDMENTS, AND HIS JUDGMENTS AND HIS TESTIMONIES AS IT IS WRITTEN IN THE LAW OF MOSES:

That thou mayest prosper in all that thou doest, and whithersoever thou turnest thyself:

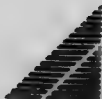
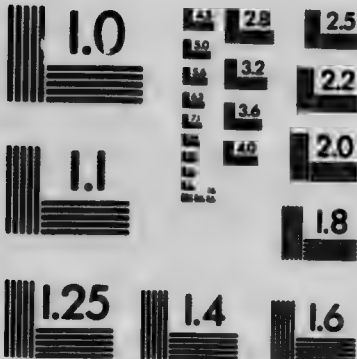
That the Lord may continue his word which he spake concerning me, saying, If thy children take heed to their way, to walk before me in truth with all their heart and with all their soul, there shall not fail thee, said he, a man on the throne of Israel."

These very foundation truths were thus solemnly charged upon the young prince—truths never to be forgotten by any head of the Jewish State. Yet there would be constant danger of their being forgotten. The spirit of the world would assert itself. Instead of living by faith in God and relying on the Divine arm, the King would be constantly tempted, as David himself had been, to rely on his military forces, on his horses and his chariots, on his alliances with other power, in short, he would be tempted to rule his kingdom as if it were one of the kingdoms of this world. Hence the strenuousness and the solemnity of the dying King's charge. His son, and his children after him (for the words were certainly intended for all his descendants who should occupy the throne), must remember that the Jewish kingdom was not a human institution like other kingdoms. The whole people were "*a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.*"



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They had been called out and constituted a nation by God himself. He was their law-giver and Supreme Sovereign. To remember this, and to act upon it in loyal obedience, would be prosperity; to forget it, failure and disaster, if not absolute ruin.

Thus far, all that the King said is perfectly natural and easy of comprehension.

But now succeed words which savour strongly, at first sight, of the spirit of this world. They sound like directions inspired by revenge, and seem incompatible with the spirit of goodwill and forgiveness which one might expect from a man so eminent for goodness (in many respects) as David undoubtedly was; and they have possibly caused some to stumble, who did not consider them with sufficient care.

The first direction (v. 5, 6) refers to his old chief captain, Joab, who has so often come before us in these studies of David's life and character. And these are the King's words:

Moreover, thou knowest also what Joab, the son of Zeruiah, did to me; and also to the two captains of the host of Israel; unto Abner the son of Ner, and unto Amasa the son of Jether, whom he slew; and shed the blood of war in peace. . . . Do therefore according to thy wisdom, and let not his hoar head go down to the grave in peace!

A harsh and revengeful charge, do we say? No; it is clearly the sentence of a chief magistrate upon a man who had been guilty of treason against David as King, in espousing the cause of the rebel Adonijah, and guilty also of two base and foul murders.

And if it be asked why the King did not bring Joab to justice himself, it can only be said that we do not well know; but that the probability is that he could not. There has been evidence enough that Joab was a man almost equal in power to the King; and in the case of Abner at least it is evident that David could not do what he would. 2 Sam. iii. 39.)

But the case was different with the young King, who now had another captain of the host, and who had been received by the people with such acclamation that he need not be afraid of anything that Joab could do.

The charge to Solomon to shew kindness to the sons of Barzillai, and to let them be attached to his person, is what might be expected from one like David, and was only a just reward for the loyalty of their father in the time of Absalom's rebellion.

Lastly, comes Shimei, the cursing and reviling Benjamite of a former day. David had received his acknowledgment and submission, and had refused permission to Abishai to slay him, for that day of rejoicing was not a day to exercise retribution.

We must certainly interpret what David then said in this sense—that is, thou shalt not die now by the sword, but thou shalt be put upon thy good behavior (Sam. xix. 21, 23.)

For now he gives a charge to Solomon *not to hold him guiltless*, but *to deal with him wisely*, as one who has unpunished guilt upon him, and who for what he has done deserves to die. Yet it is evident that the immunity on good behaviour was to be still extended to him, for Solomon, after his father's death, and execution had been done upon Joab, called for Shimei, and commanded him to dwell in Jerusalem, warning him that if at any time he left the city the suspended sentence would be executed, a course very analagous to what takes place, sometimes, in modern jurisprudence in our own day. What came of it we shall see.

But, so far as David was concerned, the matter, in all fairness, should be viewed as the act of a judge who gives charge to his successor respecting one whose life has been spared, but who has not been pardoned, and who is allowed to live under surveillance during good behavior.

One can imagine that it must have been with a sigh of relief that David as King closed this charge to his son and successor, laid down finally the cares of State, and gave utterance, as a dying man, to such thoughts as became one who had, at times, been filled to an extraordinary degree by the spirit of God.

The last words of eminent men have often been noteworthy, and the ancient fancy of the swan singing as it dies expresses the true idea that in the last days of a poet or prophet the mind may rise to an atmosphere of beauty and

truth that it had not attained when encumbered with the cares and affairs of life. Be this as it may, it is certain that those last words of David have a singular tone of beauty and sublimity, in which we cannot fail to see the outworking of a purified soul, touched with the spirit of God, and expressing itself once more in those poetical strains which have become part of the heritage of the whole church of God. Thus it was that the dying psalmist poured out his heart, the form of the utterance being evidently poetical, as was natural, the record being in the 23rd chapter of the Second Book of Samuel, which begins thus:

Now these be the last words of David (of David, let us remember, speaking now not as King and ruler, but as a prophet and inspired teacher of Israel.)

*"David, the son of Jesse, said:
And the man raised up on high,
The anointed of the God of Jacob,
And the sweet psalmist of Israel, said,*

*.
The Spirit of the Lord spake by me;
And His word was in my tongue:
The God of Israel said,
The Rock of Israel spake to me.*

*.
He that ruleth over men must be just:
Ruling in the fear of God.
And he shall be as the light of the morning,
When the sun riseth,
Even a morning without clouds;
As the tender grass springing out of the earth;
By clear shining after rain."*

Thus does the singing singer of Israel, speaking by the Spirit of God, indicate the idea of a ruler as having his foundation in justice; that supreme attribute of the Divine Ruler, so often emphasized in the revelation to Moses. No respect of persons, no pandering to the rich, no currying

favor with the multitude of the poor—rendering to every man his due measure of reward or punishment, abhorring bribes and rewards, putting aside the fear of man that bringeth a snare, but ruling always in the fear of God, and therefore no oppression, no tyranny, no extravagant indulgence,—this is the summary of duty and responsibility, spoken surely for the guidance of his descendants who should sit on the throne after him, and not for them only, but for all who should, even to the end of time, occupy positions of authority and rule the world. But the thoughts of the dying man now pass from the sphere of rule and kingship to that of the spiritual condition of his own family, and his own condition as a man about to enter the presence of the Supreme Judge. There can be no doubt that this was the thought of the dying man—not of the end of being, not a passing into nonentity, but of an entrance into a sphere of *continued* being, in which the vital question would be—What am I in the sight of the Eternal Judge, and what is the final sum of the work I have done? And here, with a mind at ease respecting himself, he cannot but think with a strange sadness of his house, of the children who would come after him, and of those who had passed into the eternal world before him.

Although, he says, my house be not so with God; yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, well ordered in all things and sure. David is not the only good man whose last days have been darkened by the thought of the alienation of his children from God! But in his case how peculiarly bitter, when he thought of the freshness of his youth, of his devotion, his faith, of the fulness of the spirit that dwelt within him, of the great honor God had put upon him in giving him such marvellous poetic power—that his words are resounding through the church to this day—and then to think of Amnon, and Absalom, and Adonijah—children of darkness and sorrow every one! And was it not a bitter reflection that all this had come upon his house through his own fault, his shameful and grievous fault in *multiplying wives unto himself*, contrary to the law of Moses; and especially in taking a wife from the heathen tribe of the Amalekites, a people cursed of God. Alas! Alas!

what a falling off was there from the bright promise of his early days! How prosperity and elevation, as is so often the case, had caused a hardening of heart and deterioration of character. And is it not plain that the very severe chastisement that was sent was to prevent a man of such eminent gifts being utterly spoiled and ruined? Indeed, it was only too true that his house *was not so with God*.

Many more sons were born to him beside these just mentioned (1 Chron. iii. 1 to 9), but of none of them is there a word in the Scripture narrative, save only that most eminent son, Solomon. It is to be feared that the few words of the dying King, "*My house is not so with God*"—that is, they are not in the covenant of the true Israel—had reference to all these and their spiritual condition at the time. From the very brief reference made to it by the dying father, it would seem that the subject was a sad and painful one. It was a relief to turn away from the thought of it to that of his own condition before God.

And thinking of this, he is comforted. He does not forget that he has greatly sinned; his emphatic reference to *salvation* proves this. And his hope is in God, as the God of the *covenant*, the everlasting covenant, *well ordered in all things and sure*, his faith evidently taking in the great promise to Abraham, and looking forward to its completion in one who was to come of his own house and line. *This is all my salvation and all my desire!*

Thus, with a few words as to the sons of Belial, who will be thrust aside as reprobate, and ultimately consumed, does the King close his dying testimony in faith and hope, and passes out of the sphere of the judgment of men to the judgment of Almighty God!

And surely we may apply to him the words of some of his own psalms, expressing faith and hope; as, for example, in the 16th: *Thou wilt show me the path of life. In thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand are pleasures for evermore!* and in the 17th: *As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness. I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness!*

Thus passed away a man whose record, so faithfully given in the Divine word, is unique in its contrasts of light and

shade, both of outward and inward life, its lofty faith and spirituality, so evidently born of God, passing suddenly, on one never-to-be-forgotten occasion, into such a yielding to sensual and cruel passion as to be a plain evidence of the possession of his soul, for a time, by the Devil. Yet, let us remember, it was only for a short time, for there is only one instance of this, while there is almost an uninterrupted lifetime of the other; while this brief period of the reign of evil in his soul is followed by such a deep development of agonized penitence as to make it plain that the Devil is cast out, and that his soul is once more dominated by the Spirit of God.

These extraordinary contrasts of spiritual condition were like the strange contrasts of his outward life. The shepherd boy, the son of a farmer in the village of Bethlehem, spending his early life in the fields tending sheep, becomes the friend and servant of the King; then, through force of circumstances all unforseen, an outlaw driven to the wilderness, a band of discontented and bankrupt men gathering about him; then, and again through a series of strange circumstances, the head of the victorious hosts of Israel, subduing Israel's enemies round about, making them tributary one after another, and leaving to his son and successor an undisputed dominion which might have continued for ages had his descendants been faithful to their national covenant.

But, reviewing that career, can we not see a guiding and determining hand in making that career, in its various phases and contrasts, so perfect an epitome of all human experience, that when, under the Spirit of God, he pours out the emotions and thoughts of his soul, now of sorrow and anon of joy, in song and psalm, he draws from the infinitely varied fountain of his own experience, and depicts their phases with such perfect truth that every man, in all conditions of life, in all changing times, and lands, poor or rich, high or low, is able to find his own special grief, his own peculiar trouble, his own (apparently unique) combination of difficulty, or his own joy and hope and triumph perfectly mirrored therein—shall be able, in fact, to feel,—this psalm was written for me!

That this has been the case with countless multitudes of people, in these Christian times, and is being the case even now, is a truth beyond all controversy. And may we not reverently conclude that it was surely brought about by Him "*who ordereth all things after the counsel of His own will*" for the highest ends, for the good of His Church, for the instruction of His people, for the advancement of His kingdom of truth and righteousness. For let us consider. There has been nothing like it in the history of the world. Here is a man whose career, if he had never written a line, would have been one of the most striking and romantic in history; the narrative of which occupies far more space in the Divine record than that of any other in the Old Testament—a man whose outward career might be compared to that of Cromwell, or even of Napoleon. Yet there would have required a combination of Cromwell and Shakspeare to make a man like David. To imagine Cromwell as a great poet, or Shakspeare becoming King of England, and leading victorious armies; to imagine Napoleon, in the intervals of victory, lifting up his soul to strains of lofty imagination and writing poems that will last as long as the world itself, is, we must feel, practically unthinkable. Yet this is what we have in this marvellous man, David.

What can we say but that it surely was of God. To Him let us give the glory. Even while we use the Psalms as the daily food of our life, let us glorify the inspiration that enabled them to be written. For in them God speaks to us in our thousand varied conditions by this his chosen servant.

But looking to the outward side of David's career, how wonderfully pregnant with instruction, comfort, warning, and stimulus that career is.

To young men setting out in life, how stimulating the story of his courage and faith, combined with practical good sense, in the encounter with Goliath. How ennobling to all men that of his loyalty and forbearance to Saul under repeated provocations.

What an example of beautiful devotion in his friendship with Jonathan; of warlike energy and capacity in his root-

ing out of the Amalekites and his many expeditions against the enemies of Israel round about.

But again, what a warning against contracting improper marriage, alliances contrary to the law of God, does his family life afford. Above all, what an object lesson of the necessity for watchfulness over the lusts and passions of the flesh we have in the terrible story of the affair of Bathsheba and her husband.

But there is scarcely need. These things are as familiar as first principles in the teaching of the Church of God, and we close the story of his career with the reflection and conviction that:

"He was a man, take him for all in all;
We ne'er shall look upon his like again."

For one such man, in the history of the church and the world, is, under, God, sufficient.

CHAPTER XIX.

MEMORABALIA OF DAVID'S CAREER:

HIS SOLDIERS, HIS CIVIL AND ECCLESIASTICAL OFFICERS.

Scattered here and there in the record of the Books of Samuel and Chronicles are some interesting notices of the prominent men in various walks of life that David had gathered round him—military, civil, and ecclesiastical. Some of these are almost anecdotal in their character, memorabilia, so to speak, and most interesting as throwing light on the character of the times as well as the men who became prominent in David's career and reign. These notices have little or no bearing on the great course of events of this remarkable reign, which is doubtless the reason why they appear in so disconnected a form—thrown in, as it were, by the way, as the personal anecdotes which are found in the lives of nearly all great men. They all, however, go to confirm the idea of the singular magnetism of David's character, and the power he had of drawing strong men about him. They give us a clear idea, moreover, of his great powers of organization, both in civil and military life, and they seem to suggest a much higher development of both than we have been accustomed to think of as appertaining to so early a time as that of David.

But it is evident that this Hebrew people, chosen and select; and with so admirable a civil and ecclesiastical system bequeathed to them, through the hand of Moses, were on a far higher level of intelligence and civilization than the neighbouring nations; even though they might be inferior in military capacity and strength, as was the case at times between them and the Philistines, and as, in modern times, the Turks are inferior to the Greeks. And upon this, these side records and jottings throw much light.

Some of these are military, some civil, and some ecclesiastical. Of the military, some of the most interesting belong to the period when David was an outlaw in the wilderness. They were not all vagabonds and debtors that gathered about him; some of them were warriors of renown, men of the same spirit with David himself (2 Sam. xxiii. 8 to 18). Thus there were his *three mighty men*—ADINO the Eznite, who was a very Samson in bodily strength; ELEAZAR the Ahohite, who was one of the three that stood their ground against the Philistines when others had gone away, had, in fact, fled. *He arose, says the chronicle, and smote the Philistines till his hand was weary and his hand clave to his sword; turned defeat into victory; and the people returned after him only to spoil.*"

After him, SHAMMAH the Hararite is named. He also did the same thing. *The Philistines came out foraging; the people fled; but he stood in the midst of the ground and slew the Philistines. And the Lord wrought a great victory.*

These three men were the heroes of an exploit that has immortalized them and shed lustre also on the character of David himself. While he was in hold in the wilderness fastnesses of Judah, the Philistines had penetrated as far inland as Bethlehem, and established a fortified camp there. One day, in great thirst, David cried out: *Oh that one would give me drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem which is by the gate!*

A very natural longing, for the well was one he had known from childhood. But he could never suppose, nor did he wish that three of his men would undertake such a desperate enterprise as to go to Bethlehem, garrisoned as it was by the Philistines, and attempt to draw and bring away water from the well. But this was what these three men did. And it shows strikingly of what mettle they were. It shows extraordinary affection with which David had inspired them thus early in his romantic career. Men are said to have done some such things for Napoleon, but he was not the man to acknowledge such deeds as David did. For when these *three mighty men* broke through the host of the Philistines, drew the water, took it, and brought it safely to David, he

was so profoundly touched by the devoted loyalty of the men that he would not drink the water, but poured it out unto the Lord. And he said, lifting up his soul in prayer, *Be it far from me, O Lord, that I should do this. Is not this the blood of the men that went in jeopardy of their lives? Therefore he would not drink it, and to his eternal honor is it recorded (2 Sam. xxiii. 8 to 18).*

ABISHAI, brother of the famous Joab, was also amongst the men of Adullam, and chief of another band of three. Later on in the history we read that he saved the King's life in the stress of battle. In one of the many conflicts with the Philistines, David, fighting in person, was assailed by a man of gigantic stature, another Goliath, who was girded with a new sword, and thought to have slain David. But Abishai succoured him, and smote and killed the Philistine (2 Sam. xxi. 16, 17).

When this battle was over, the soldiers gathered around David, and swore that he should go no more out to battle in the ranks, that the light of Israel, they said, be not quenched!

In this campaign it was that other men of gigantic stature appeared in the ranks of the Philistines, one of them the brother of Goliath of Gath, while another had the extraordinary peculiarity of being born with six fingers on each hand and six toes on each foot. These were both slain by David's soldiers (2 Sam. xxi. 15 to 22).

Turning again to the men of Adullam, we find the name of BENAIAH, who became in after days the chief captain of David's army. Of him it is said, *he had done many acts. He slew two lion-like men of Moab, a deed of daring evidently; also he went down and slew a lion in the midst of a pit in time of snow.*

But his principal exploit was to slay an Egyptian, a goodly man who had a spear in his hand. Benaiah went down to him with a staff, plucked the spear out of the Egyptian's hand, and slew him with his own spear—evidently a hero of the type of our Richard I. or Amadis de Gaul.

It is said of some of these mighty men, helpers of David

while he kept himself close because of Saul, that they were armed with bows, and could use both the right hand and the left in hurling stones and shooting arrows out of a bow.

This hurling stones was doubtless the use of the sling as a regular military weapon. And what it was capable of, the history of David bears eloquent witness.

A very careful muster roll was made of all these men, and their names and rank are given at length in the Book of Chronicles. Of some of these, the men of Gad, who separated themselves unto David in the wilderness, it is said they were men of might, men of war, fit for the battle, that could handle shield and buckler, whose faces were like the faces of lions, and who were as swift as the roes upon the mountains!

These are they, says the Chronicle, that went over Jordan in the first month, when it had overflowed all its banks (a daring feat indeed, considering what a rushing torrent the river becomes at such times); and they put to flight all them of the valleys, both towards the east and towards the west (1 Chron. xii. 1 to 15).

No wonder David was able to achieve such victories as he did with the splendid warlike material that men like these afforded, who only wanted proper organization and leadership, such as he supplied, to become invincible, God indeed helping them. And we may well conclude that it was the absence of such men as these from the army of Saul that led to the disastrous defeat on Mount Gilboa.

The spirit that animated both the volunteers and their leader is well set forth in the following extract from the same chapter where we read that some of the tribe of Benjamin and Judah came to the hold unto David. David went out to meet them, and said: *If ye be come peaceably to me to help me, mine heart shall be knit unto you. But if ye be come to betray me to mine enemies, seeing there is no wrong in mine hands, the God of our fathers look thereon and rebuke it.*

My heart shall be knit unto you, said David to these men. Here is the magnetic force of his personality. His loyal affection for his followers drew out their loyal regard to him.

And so we cannot wonder that a quick and warm response leaped forth from the lips of their leader: *Thine are we, David, and on thy side, thou son of Jesse; peace, peace be unto thee, and peace to thine helpers, for thy God helpeth thee!*

These words were spoken by Amasai, and it is said that *the spirit came upon him*—the spirit, it probably means, of loyal affection, responding to the spirit-stirring words of David (1 Chron. xii. 17, 18).

There are a few interesting references in these chronicles to the civil affairs of the State that certainly suggest a higher development in the sphere of government than is commonly supposed. Thus, at the first organization of the whole kingdom under David, we read, after the detail of certain military arrangements, that JEHOSEPHAT, *the son of Ahilud, was the RECORDER* (2 Sam. viii. 16). The word Recorder is one of very indefinite meaning in English, for magistrates and judges of Lower Courts are often called by that title. But in the margin the word is given as *Remembrancer, or Writer of Chronicles*; a sort of high officer of State, whose duty it was to keep a record of the events of the kingdom as they transpired, mainly for the use of the king.

Another officer of a similar character was SERAIAH. He is called the SCRIBE (v. 17), or, as the margin has it, the *Secretary*, and his duties probably corresponded with those of our Clerk of the Privy Council—that is, to make notes of the meetings between David and his military and civil officers from time to time.

And probably the King's sons, as they became old enough, were called to these conferences, as seems to be indicated in the same passage. (v. 18.) They would thus fit themselves for taking part in the affairs of the kingdom. And in these meetings of Council Absalom doubtless learned much that enabled him to play the wicked role which culminated in rebellion.

Solomon alone appears to have used what he learned to his own profit and that of the kingdom. For the great framework instituted by David was continued by him in

substance after he became king; for we find this very man, Jehoshaphat, still in office as Recorder, while the Scribes or Secretaries were now two (1 Kings iv. 3).

We can understand from all this how the original records of these times that have come down to us were written, viz., by official men, who were in touch with all that transpired, and were able to compile chronicles from their own knowledge and not by hearsay (the Spirit of God overseeing and directing all). And this will account for the want of literary style exhibited so often, as indicating records made by busy men at the time, and often writing under the pressure of State affairs and in the exigencies of war.

The last of the men who are worthy of note are certain of the children of Issachar, of whom it is said that *they had understanding of the times to know what Israel ought to do.* (1 Chron. xii. 32.) Certainly a valuable set of men in any age and country to any king or ruler! True statesmen, such as in our day, would be model members of Parliament or Cabinet Ministers. For it has been in many critical times that the want of such sagacity in kings or statesmen has brought ruin to individuals and disaster to the country, as witness, for a single example, to go no farther, our own Charles the First and the Bourbon Kings of France.

Another class of men who are named for service in civil life are called PORTERS, who were certainly something more than mere bearers of burdens, but rather a sort of police or guards of the house of the Lord and the city (1 Chron. xxvi. 4, etc.) Of these porters, so called, OBED-EDOM is specially marked out, "*for God blessed him, his sons and grandsons being many, all strong men, able for service.*"

Then there were the men, principally Levites, who had charge of the *Treasures* of the house of God, and of the dedicated things. *Shebael*, a descendant of Moses, was one of these; the only instance where one of his descendants held office—a very noteworthy fact.

These *dedicated things* were mostly spoils won in battle,

and given up to the Lord for service. These spoils were of gold and silver and brass in great quantity, taken from the Syrians and other nations whom David had subdued (2 Sam. viii. 7).

The whole of the foregoing gives us the idea of a thoroughly organized State, of great wealth, possessing a large number of able men both in military and civil life, altogether far beyond the age and time in which they lived; David himself being the originator of the whole, and a man, in this respect, much like our own King Alfred the Great, of famous memory.

The religious organization of the land followed of necessity closely on the lines laid down in the Law of Moses. But in one particular, that of Psalmody and Music there was a development entirely of David's own. It is noticeable that there was no provision for this in the statutes communicated through the great Lawgiver. But, under the hand of David, a very elaborate musical service arose, which was continued and perpetuated in the worship of the Temple. And this came about very naturally, he being so eminent in both Psalmody and music himself. Of the whole a full account is given in the First Book of Chronicles, chap. xxv. There we have before us the three chief leaders of Psalmody, ASAPH, HEMAN, and JEDUTHAN—names so familiar to us through the Book of Psalms—each of these leaders having sons—Asaph four, Jeduthun six, Heman fourteen. *All these, it is stated, were under the hands of their father for song in the house of the Lord, with Cymbals, Psalteries, and Harps, according to the King's order, numerous others being under them, the whole forming a band of two hundred and eighty-eight.* These were divided into twenty-four courses, chosen by lot, *ward against ward, as well the small as the great, the teacher as the scholar.* The names of all those are fully given in the choral roll found in verses 7 to 31. In addition to those were large numbers of Levites, of whom the foregoing were probably leaders.

We are all well aware that while the psalms and divine

songs that were sung are fully preserved in that book of Psalms which has ever since been the medium of praise in the church, not a vestige remains of the music. What the tunes or tones were like, we have not the shadow of an idea, a fact which may impress upon us the truth (and we need to be reminded of it sometimes) that the mere music is *nothing* in itself, while the sense is everything. (Some Christian Churches do need to remember the pregnant words of the Apostle Paul, that all that is said and sung in the Christian assembly shall be such as the congregation understand.) (1 Cor. xiv.)

Besides this ordering of the musical service, the King arranged the services of the Levites in courses, to every man and company their work about the Tabernacle, part of their work also being to thank and praise the Lord morning and evening. The Porters also seem to have been Levites, and many other officers of the State also (1 Chron. xxiii.).

All this gives the impression of the King as a man of great organizing genius, whether in military, civil or in ecclesiastical life; a many-sided man, eminent in war, in civil administration, in ecclesiastical affairs, as well as in music, but, above all, eminent as being the instrument of conveying Divine thoughts and ideas, by the Spirit of God, in poetry and psalm, to distant ages and lands, even to the end of time.

And this leads to the last of our thoughts of this wonderful man, viz., the contrast between the fleeting and evanescent character of all he did as a soldier, an administrator, a builder, or rather a preparer for building—and what he did as a writer of Psalms.

Had any one of his officers or contemporaries been asked as to what, of all David's works, would remain, and what would pass away, he would doubtless have said something like this: The great Temple which is contemplated, and for which such vast preparations have been made in permanent materials such as gold and silver, brass and iron, and precious stones, that surely will abide till the end of time. And this kingdom, organized with such far-seeing

sagacity and skill in all its various departments, that surely will abide also ; indeed there is a Divine covenant that it shall.

But what, an enquirer might say, of those songs which the king has composed, which he began to write when he was a mere boy, and which he has been adding to ever since ? Will these remain, and be known after the king is dead ?

Not very likely, would have been a probable answer. For what *are* these songs ? Many of them mere amusements of the king's idle hours. And though many of them are now sung in the house of the Lord, this officer might go on to say, and will be sung for a time,—it is probable their use will be discontinued, for there is no provision whatever for them in the law of Moses. So long as there are no troubles in the land, they may be preserved by the king's secretaries and by the leaders of music in the Temple that is to be. But let there be more wars and rebellions, or sieges, let an enemy, (which God forbid,) enter our sacred city, men will surely have something else to do than to trouble about preserving these songs and the manuscripts containing them.

This doubtless would have been the judgment of the wise men of the world in those times. But how short-sighted !

The Temple was built ; and the gold and silver, the brass and iron and costly stones, all were worked into the structure. But not a vestige of it remains, or has been seen in the world for more than two thousand years. The great foundation walls of solid masonry built by Solomon still abide, for they form part of the walls of the city and prove the truth of the sacred record. But the Temple itself, with its gold and precious stones has utterly perished from the earth. Its services and sacrifices and priesthood came to a final end soon after the time of our Lord's ministry on earth. And David's kingdom, wonderfully organized as it was, though it lasted for centuries, that came to an end too, in its outward and secular sense.

But these songs of the shepherd boy of Bethlehem, of the persecuted outlaw in the wilderness, of the warrior king and conqueror, of the deeply humbled and sorrowing

sinner, of the heart-broken father, of the dying saint,—where are they? They abide. They have survived the wars and sieges, and rebellions and massacres and fires and desolations of three thousand years. And in all the range of poetry now being said or sung there is nothing that can be compared for a moment, for living force and spiritual efficacy, and far-reaching power, and that in all the languages of the world, and amongst all people, with these simple outpourings of soul of this man, in this little country of Judea, and in an age long before any of the great empires, the great philosophers, the great poets, the great literateurs of the world began to be.

It is marvellous indeed! And how came it about?

How, except that the All-Wise and Everliving Ruler of the world spake to the world in these songs; and so ordered affairs that they should be preserved, and handed down in a written and certain form, from generation to generation, a striking illustration of the saying that while *all flesh is grass, and all the glory of man is as the flower of the field*, THE WORD OF THE LORD ENDURETH FOREVER!

And the kingdom of David itself survives; not in its outward aspect, but spiritually. It was promised to be continued to the end of time, and so it is being continued in the spiritual kingdom of the Son of David, a kingdom not of this world, but a reign over the soul and the conscience of mankind; a kingdom, *not of meat and drink*, or anything outward, but of RIGHTEOUSNESS, AND PEACE, AND JOY IN THE HOLY GHOST!

THE WORD OF THE LORD
ENDURETH FOREVER